2005 Wisconsin Fishing Report

Free

WISCONSIN DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Fisheries Management & Habitat Protection Program • Bureau of Communication & Education

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Eric Haataja

2005 Fishing Forecasts*

** Forecasts as of Dec. 13, 2004*

Let's go fishing!

Where to fish?

This fishing report can help guide you to the fishing experience you're after. For more ideas, go to www.fishingwisconsin.org then click on "Where to Fish." Or find public fishing areas and stream easements by using DNR's online mapping tool at dnr.wi.gov/org/land/facilities/dnr_lands_mapping.html.

A trio of lake-related Web pages also offers more good ideas and information:

- Lake Maps at dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/lakes/lakemap/
- The Wisconsin Lake Book at dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/lakes/list/#lakebook
- Water quality data and reports at dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/lakes/lakesdatabase.asp

Kevin Naze

Need a fishing license?

3 quick and convenient ways:

- Call toll free at 1-877-945-4236
- Go online to www.wildlifelicense.com
- Visit any license agent location or DNR service center

Need to borrow fishing tackle?

Rods and reels, hooks and other fishing equipment are available from some state parks and DNR offices. If you want to take a large group fishing, call ahead to reserve equipment and consider taking an angler education instructor course. Find a list of loaner sites and more information on introducing kids to fishing online at www.fishingwisconsin.org then look under "Kids, Parents, Educators."

Fabulous fisheries projects

For more projects, see pages 4-5

Walleye, sturgeon return to Milwaukee River

Walleye and lake sturgeon cruising the Milwaukee River are the latest signs of hope and progress for a river that once was an open sewer for the state's largest city. Decades of pollution cleanup efforts and some key dam removals have made the river more hospitable to fish and allowed the Department of Natural Resources to carry out its goals of restoring native species to the state's waters.

Brad Eggold, southern Lake Michigan fisheries supervisor, releases lake sturgeon fingerlings into the Milwaukee River as part of an effort to restore the fish to the river and Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan. Photo: Bob Queen

Projects to return walleye and lake sturgeon to the Milwaukee reached milestones in 2004. Nearly 60,000 extended growth Great Lakes strain walleye fingerlings have been stocked in the Lower Milwaukee River since 1995, and an extensive research effort to evaluate the stocking's effect wrapped up in 2004.

Early on in the project, DNR fish biologists' analysis of the contents of walleye stomachs spurred the agency to move the stocking location to avoid walleye preying on young chinook salmon also stocked in the Milwaukee River. Since then, research by DNR Southern Lake Michigan fisheries staff Pradeep Hirethota, Thomas Burzynski, Brad Eggold and Jim Thompson has revealed that the stocked walleye have shown good survival, grew faster than the statewide average, and matured, although no documented successful natural reproduction has occurred.

The fish have provided fishing opportunities for a growing and significant number of anglers, with most anglers practicing catch-and-release.

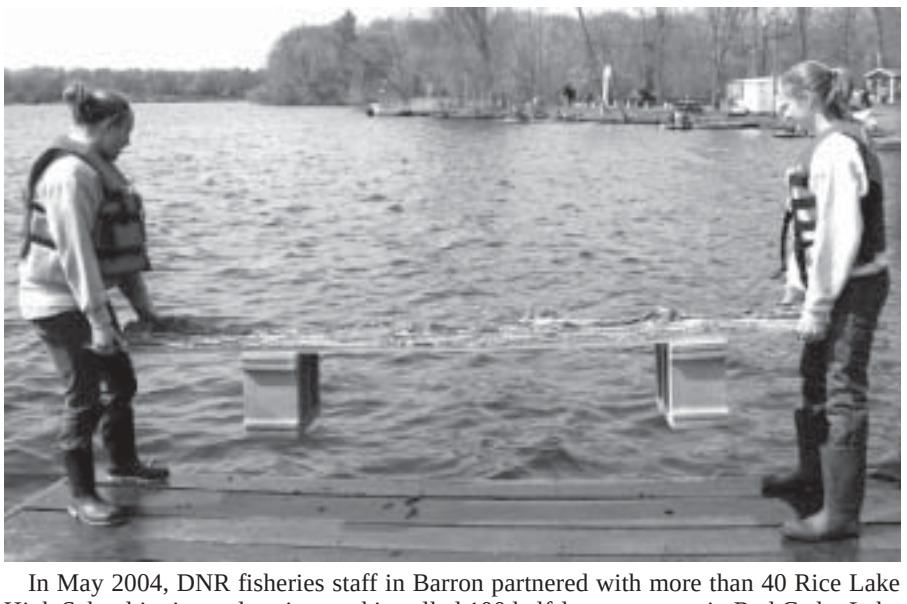
Based on those findings, DNR, as of late December 2004, had prepared a new draft walleye restoration plan calling for continued stocking for up to five years to increase the odds that mature male and female fish encounter one another in the river system and reproduce naturally. Both the research report and the draft management plan can be found online at dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/fish/lakemich/managementreports.htm.

Lake sturgeon restoration efforts got a big boost in December 2004 with the release of 2,000 eight-inch lake sturgeon fingerlings raised at the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery. The release, the fifth so far in recent years, further improves the odds that, after more than a century, Wisconsin's largest and longest-lived fish will once again cruise the river on their spawning runs.

Also in 2004, six adult sturgeon with radio transmitters were stocked in the river. In previous years, 64,000 lake sturgeon larvae and 200 yearlings, or year-old fish, were stocked in the river.

Their return to the Milwaukee River capitalizes on significant gains in water quality resulting from DNR's program requiring all wastewater dischargers to meet pollution limits, and the public and private investment in upgrading municipal and industrial wastewater treatment plants that followed, according to Will Wawrzyn, DNR's Milwaukee River fish biologist. State and local efforts to reduce polluted runoff from farms and urban areas also have helped, and the complete removal in 1997 of the North Avenue Dam by the City of Milwaukee, DNR and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, allowed that stretch of the Milwaukee River to run freely for the first time since 1835. DNR completed some major habitat improvement activities in the formerly impounded area that have helped spur the return of a variety of native fish. Thirty species have been documented since. Now walleye and lake sturgeon have joined the roster.

Barron County smallie habitat gets boost



In May 2004, DNR fisheries staff in Barron partnered with more than 40 Rice Lake High School junior and seniors and installed 100 half-log structures in Red Cedar Lake in northeastern Barron County. The half-logs provide overhead cover for smallmouth bass during spawning periods as well as refuge for many fish species throughout the year. Dan Graff, local biology teacher from Rice Lake, was the project coordinator. - *Heath Benike, fisheries biologist, Barron*

Dear Wisconsin Angler,

There are many reasons why fishing in Wisconsin is great – from our vast numbers of lakes and streams to our wide variety of fish species. But the most important reason is you! Wisconsin anglers buy fishing licenses and stamps, and pay a federal excise tax on fishing tackle. All of that money goes directly to pay for DNR fish management activities that make fishing better in Wisconsin.

The trout you caught in that section of stream that never used to have fish is probably there because DNR used your trout stamp dollars to improve the habitat.

That chinook you caught in Lake Michigan, the brookie you pulled in from a Class 2 or 3 trout stream, and the musky you fought on a Category 0, 2, 3 or 4 musky water probably came from a DNR hatchery, as did that lunch you enjoyed from a stocked walleye water.

The special fishing place you go to escape may only be open to you because DNR has purchased land or secured an easement to allow for public fishing.

The public boat ramp or fishing pier you launched from was probably built or at least partially paid for by DNR.

Your children may have learned to fish at a DNR-sponsored aquatic education class.

And that trophy you caught is there because the DNR conducts fisheries surveys and uses that information to set appropriate season, bag and size limits.

Our fish biologists, technicians and hatchery personnel may do the work, but Wisconsin anglers deserve the credit for being willing to pay for and support these programs, as well as offer their time, money and talents on many specific fisheries projects. As you enjoy another outstanding year of fishing in Wisconsin, I hope you'll agree that the modest cost of a fishing license is an investment that pays big returns for Wisconsin's anglers!

Please have a great year of fishing and we'll see you on the water!

Sincerely,
Mike Staggs,
Director Bureau of Fisheries
Management and Habitat Protection

Your Investment in Great Wisconsin Fishing

Here's what DNR fisheries management does to help you land that trophy, enjoy a shore lunch, or fill your stringer:

- Maintain a network of fish biologists and technicians across the state – 93 percent of our fisheries staff are in local offices or hatcheries so they're where the work is and can work directly with area anglers and groups. You can find your local biologist in our online directory.
- Conduct scientifically based fisheries management work on 15,000 inland lakes and 44,000 miles of inland stream in 71 counties, as well as on Wisconsin waters of Lake Superior and Lake Michigan. We monitor fish populations and angler and commercial harvest, set and evaluate harvest regulations and stocking quotas, plan and implement habitat restoration and improvement projects, and review stocking, fish farm and water regulation permits. We also conduct educational and cooperative activities with the public, and every year, sample fish populations and habitat quality on as many as 500 stream sites and 200 lakes. Some of that data is now available online.
- Improve trout stream habitat using dedicated funds from inland trout stamp revenues supplemented by regular operating funds. Each year the $1.1 million raised by the sale of trout stamps and patron licenses is spent to restore and improve 25 to 30 miles of degraded trout streams. More than 600 miles have been improved since the program began in 1979. Every two years we publish a full accounting of the use of the trout stamp funds. Copies are available at DNR offices or online.
- Produce up to 80 million fish a year for stocking. We operate 13 state fish hatcheries and rearing stations, three egg collection weirs, and 10 to 15 fish production ponds. We annually produce 7.6 million trout and salmon fingerlings and yearlings, 5 million musky, walleye, bass, pike and sturgeon fingerlings, and up to 50 million fry for stocking in about 15 percent of state waters. In 2006, long overdue reconstruction is to begin at the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery. Our online stocking database allows you to find how many fish were stocked in your favorite waters.
- Carry out federally required monitoring of walleye and musky fish populations, and state and tribal harvest in the ceded territory's 860 walleye and 665 musky lakes. Comprehensive monitoring ensures that fish populations are not overharvested and remain healthy. Monitoring results and other information are available online.
- Monitor sport and commercial fish populations and harvest in Lake Michigan and Lake Superior, operate three large vessels, set harvest quotas and regulations, set and evaluate stocking quotas, and cooperate with other states and provinces. Sales of the Great Lakes Salmon and Trout stamp provide funds for the stocking necessary to maintain salmon and trout fisheries. Every two years we publish a full accounting of how we use these funds. Copies are available from DNR offices or online on our Lake Michigan web pages.
- Protect critical habitat and provide fishing access by purchasing land and easements from willing sellers. Over the years, we've acquired almost 120,000 acres of fishery lands and stream easements. You can find these lands using a mapping tool on DNR's Web site.
- Develop and maintain boat launches and shore fishing piers across the state. Directories and listings of places to fish, including accessible fishing opportunities, are available online.
- Sample fish populations for mercury, PCBs and other potentially harmful contaminants. We have documented that the vast majority of waters in Wisconsin have large populations of fish that are very healthy to eat on a regular basis. Each year we publish a fish health advisory for sport caught fish which identifies those waters or species and sizes of fish for which anglers should avoid or limit their fish consumption. Copies of the advisory are available from any DNR office or online.
- Train a network of volunteer aquatic education instructors and sponsor kids fishing clinics and education classes. Today's children are tomorrow's anglers and stewards of our aquatic resources. Each year up to 15,000 children participate in this DNR sponsored program. Find more information and a schedule of clinics online or by calling our aquatic resources educator, Theresa Stabo, (608) 266-2272.
- Ensure you have the latest information on fish, aquatic resources, fishing opportunities, and DNR programs. We do this by maintaining a comprehensive Web site: http//www.fishingwisconsin.org which has links to recent news releases, staff directories, searchable fish stocking, fish population and creel survey databases, places to go fishing, lands and access directories, the latest fishing information, and DNR publications and reports. We also publish regulation summaries, informational brochures, maps and educational materials. Two popular documents are our trout stream book which contains descriptions and maps of all trout streams in the state, and the lakes directory which lists all lakes in the state with information about location, size, access and fish species present. Copies of most publications can be downloaded from our Web site.

Habitat is where it's at!

Wisconsin's great fishing depends less on stocking, fishing regulations and other attention-grabbing management tools and more on safeguarding good habitat and water quality, according to the state's top fisheries official and a growing body of research.

"Habitat protection, restoration and management is the most cost effective way to maintain good fishing," says Mike Staggs, who leads Wisconsin's fisheries program. "Fish survive and reproduce in good numbers when the water quality and habitat are good — and that's all free."

More than 90 percent of Wisconsin waters are supported entirely by natural reproduction and do not need stocking. Assuring these waters have good water quality and habitat is a major focus and funding priority, reflected in the official name — the Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection program.

In addition to biologists and technicians, the program employs experts in protecting habitat and managing lakes and rivers. The fishing licenses and stamps anglers buy pay for traditional fish management staff and activities, but federal funds, motorboat gas tax revenues, permit review fees and general purpose revenues variously pay for habitat protection and lake management staff and activities.

Together, these staff pursued an array of activities in 2004 that benefited fish and anglers. For example, they:

- Improved trout habitat on 28 miles of trout streams statewide.
- Improved habitat for warmwater fish on several dozen waters.
- Worked with DNR lands staff to acquire 1,102 acres at $2,914,981 for state public fishery areas and access.
- Awarded 111 DNR Lake Planning grants totaling $900,000 to local governments and lake organizations to develop assessments, comprehensive management plans and related educational efforts to benefit lake water quality and habitat.
- Awarded 24 DNR Lake Protection Grants totaling more than $2 million to local governments and lake groups to acquire habitat and environmentally sensitive lands, restore wetlands and shoreland habitat, and control polluted runoff.
- Wrote administrative rules to establish a new grant program to help control zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species and awarded 29 grants totaling nearly $500,000 to local governments for their control and prevention projects.
- Met with thousands of lake and riverfront property owners to advise them on how to design, build and locate their shoreline projects to avoid or minimize damaging critical habitat.

Staggs, habitat protection chief Mary Ellen Vollbrecht and other habitat protection staff also invested significant time and effort in 2004 in revising administrative rules to reflect a new law that significantly changed Wisconsin's shoreline project permit and review system. DNR's work focused on assuring the proposed rules met lawmakers' goals of giving waterfront property owners faster, more consistent decisions without weakening protections for critical habitat along public lakes and rivers.

Recent studies in Wisconsin and elsewhere underscore the vital link between good habitat and good fishing:

- Good naturally reproducing muskellunge populations have on average only 20 percent of their shoreline developed while poor muskellunge populations have on average 40 percent of their shoreline developed.[1]
- Bluegill production is 2.5 times higher in lakes with no development versus developed lakes.[2]
- Trout populations are eliminated in watersheds with more than 11 percent of the land impervious to water as a result of being paved over or built over. [3]
- The amount of woody cover and aquatic plant growth for fish cover declines exponentially with the amount of shoreline development[4, 5]

The bottom line, Staggs says, "is if you want great fishing – then you have to protect fish habitat."

References:

[1] Lake characteristics influencing spawning success of muskellunge in northern Wisconsin lakes. 2002. A.J. Rust, J.S. Diana, T. L. Margenau and C. J. Edwards. North American Journal of Fisheries Management 22:834-841.

[2] Patterns of fish growth along a residential development gradient in north temperate lakes. 2000. D. E. Schindler, S. I. Geib and M. R. Williams. Ecosystems 0:1-10.

[3] Watershed urbanization and changes in fish communities in southeastern Wisconsin streams. 2000. L. Wang, J. Lyons, P. Kanehl, R. Bannerman and E. Emmons. Journal of the American Water Resources Association 36(5):1173-1189.

[4] Impacts of lakeshore residential development on coarse woody debris in north temperate lakes. 1996. D.L. Christensen, B.R. Herwig, D.E. Schindler and S. R. Carpenter. Ecological Applications 6:1143-1149.

[5] Consequences of human lakeshore development on emergent and floating-leaf vegetation abundance. 2001. P. Radomski and T. J. Goeman. North American Journal of Fisheries Management 21:46-61.

Wisconsin fishing by the numbers

159 fish species
15,000 lakes, 44,000 river miles
1.4 million licensed anglers
22 million fishing days annually
Second only to Florida in number of nonresident fishing days
69 million fish caught annually, 31 million kept
$2.3 billion in economic activity
$100 million in state income and sales tax revenues

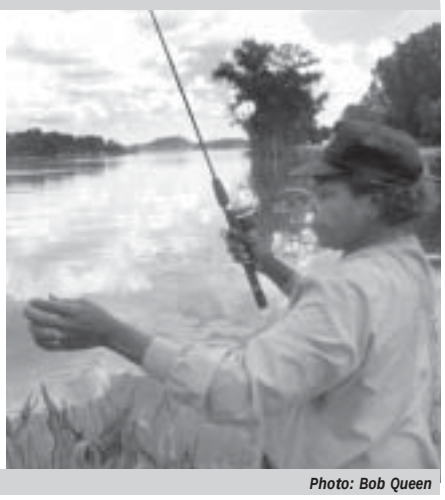


Photo: Bob Queen

Brown trout is one of six state records set in 2004

36+ pounder likely a DNR hatchery fish

ALGOMA, Wis. — After Richard Crowe of Ankeny, Iowa, hauled in a state record- setting brown trout from Lake Michigan, he wasn't the only one grinning and passing around photos.

State fish hatchery staff were feeling like proud parents. The 36-pound, 8.9 ounce brown trout that Crowe landed Aug. 23, 2004, on his first-ever charter fishing trip to Lake Michigan was likely a fish raised by a Department of Natural Resources hatchery.

DNR's annual stocking of trout and salmon is necessary to maintain the Lake Michigan fishery because fish don't successfully naturally reproduce in Wisconsin waters of the big lake.

Crowe's catch erased the previous record by more than a pound and, at 40.5 inches in length, was 2 inches longer, according to Karl Scheidegger, the fish biologist who maintains state fish records for the DNR.

Crowe's catch was the fifth state record established in Wisconsin in 2004, but the year's first for a game fish. Many of the more than 25 records that have fallen since 1999 have been for more unusual fish, such as the quillback carpsucker, the mooneye, and the burbot, reflecting in part increased public awareness of existing state records as a result of DNR's online listing of state record fish, Scheidegger says.

It also reflects Wisconsin's diversity of fish: 159 fish species in 27 families, 14 of them introduced nonnative species.

Other anglers claiming new state records in 2004, in chronological order are:

- Jamie Slifer of Eau Claire set a new spearing record for common carp with a 48 pound, 3 ounce haul from Lake Eau Claire.
- Michael Matthew of Buffalo City set a new spearing record for bowfin with a 7 pound, 6.9 ounce fish from the Mississippi River in Buffalo County.
- David R. Tilton of Janesville caught a 73-pound, 1.6-ounce bigmouth buffalo on Lake Koshkonong in Jefferson County that demolished the previous record of 54 pounds.
- Glenn F. Fields of Berlin caught a 1 pound, 13 ounce northern hog sucker in the Fox River in Green Lake County.
- Daniel Kane of Elm Grove caught an 8.5 inch, 4 ounce creek chub from Honey Creek in Milwaukee County.

If you catch a fish that may be a state record follow these tips:

- Don't clean or, if at all possible, freeze the fish.
- Keep the fish cool, preferably on ice
- Get the fish weighed as soon as possible on a certified scale (usually found in grocery, hardware stores, etc.) and witnessed by an observer.
- Contact the nearest DNR Service Center to get the fish species positively identified and to find out whether the fish is actually a state record.
- Obtain and complete a record fish application, available at DNR Service Centers or downloadable from www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/fish/record/3brecord.htm
- If possible, take a photo of you holding your prize catch and send it in to the DNR Bureau of Fisheries Management & Habitat Protection, Box 7921, Madison, Wis., 53707, in care of Karl Scheidegger.

Richard Crowe's first Lake Michigan charter fishing trip will be tough to beat. The Ankeny, Iowa man landed a new state record brown trout, a 36-pound, 8-ounce fish caught near Algoma with captain Andy Guth. Photo: Kevin Naze

To read about state record fish, go online to www.fishingwisconsin.org, then look under "Wisconsin fish" for "record fish."

Stocking

Fiscal year 2003-04 DNR Production Summary— hatcheries, ponds, and co-op ponds

Species	Total Fish Stocked	Small Fingerling	Large Fingerling	Yearling	Adult
Brook Trout	319,984	194,297	55,965	64,992	977
Brown Trout	2,374,247	758,361	753,808	824,919	5,232
Chinook Salmon	1,513,763	1,513,763			
Coho Salmon	534,176		255,085	279,091	
Hybrid Muskellunge	549		549		
Lake Sturgeon	48,768	20,971	24,904	2,893	
Lake Trout	205,907	35,900	132,314	37,693	
Largemouth Bass	118,591	118,591			
Muskellunge	144,644		144,396	248	
Northern Pike	3,936	1,776	2,160		
Rainbow Trout	781,895	196,797	28,700	542,671	1,827
Sauger	4,000		4,000		
Smallmouth Bass	4,950		4,950		
Splake	119,573	25,485	94,088		
Walleye	4,791,175	4,700,482	90,693		

Fish stocking information online

Anglers can go online to learn where the state stocks fish. The Web site is found at www.fishingwisconsin.org, then look under "Wisconsin fish" and select "stocking." The direct URL is www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/fish/pages/stocking.shtml.

The Web site features an interactive map of Wisconsin that allows people to easily retrieve and view or print a stocking report for a particular county, all counties at once, Lake Michigan, or Lake Superior.

"Ninety percent of Wisconsin's waters already have outstanding game or panfishing entirely due to natural reproduction, but stocking is an important component of the 10 to 15 percent of Wisconsin waters that are stocked," says Mike Staggs, who directs the DNR Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection program. "Stocking helps restore or maintain fisheries in these waters, expanding opportunities for anglers."

Staggs cautions that whether a waterbody is stocked or not is not always a good indicator of how good the fishing will be. But the stocking database should help steer trout anglers to good action on Class 2 and 3 trout waters, and to musky hunters fishing Category 0, 2, 3, and 4 musky waters. These waters generally rely on stocking for good fishing. Listings of Class 2 and 3 trout waters, and of all categories of musky waters, can be found at wwwfishingwisconsin. org, then scroll down and select "Where to fish" and look for "Wisconsin Trout Streams" or "Musky Waters."

Groundbreaking for Wild Rose Hatchery renovation set for 2006

The state expects to break ground next year on a major renovation of Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery, a century-old workhorse of Wisconsin's system to raise and stock fish.

If work goes according to plan, detailed blueprints will be drawn up during 2005 and groundbreaking would occur in winter or spring 2006. The work would be done in phases through 2009 to spread out the costs and minimize disruptions in fish production.

Aging facilities and water supply issues at the hatchery, which the state bought in 1908, are threatening its ability to continue meeting the demand for its fish, the majority of which are stocked in the Great Lakes. Wild Rose now produces fully 27 percent of the trout and salmon, 64 percent of the northern pike, and 100 percent of lake sturgeon and spotted musky stocked statewide, according to Al Kaas, statewide fish propagation coordinator.

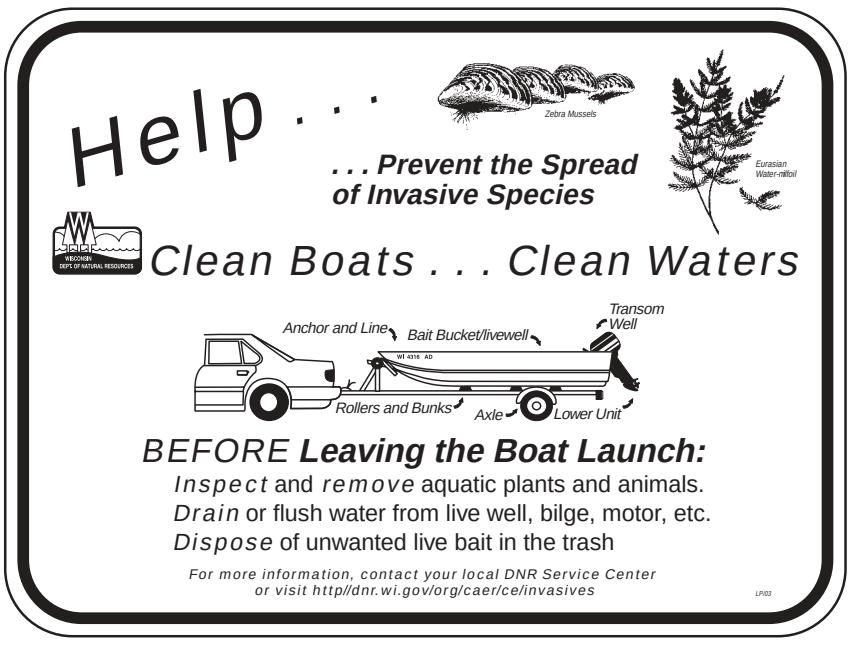
Renovating Wild Rose will require building essentially two new facilities – a coldwater hatchery for trout and salmon and a coolwater hatchery for northern, musky, walleye and sturgeon. It also will require abandoning some existing buildings, which are now located in former wetlands, and restoring the wetlands.

The renovation will be done in two phases to allow the hatchery to continue producing fish during construction.

Once completed, the project will allow the agency to comply with groundwater and wetland protection rules written since the hatchery was built. It will also allow the hatchery to accomodate new or additional production of fish for the Great Lakes, Kaas says. Feral rainbow trout for stocking in Lake Michigan, small fingerling walleye, pike and sturgeon, and large fingerling northern and sturgeon, are among the increased or new fish production planned.

The state budget approved for 2004-05 included approval for $12.5 million of bonding authority for Phase I of the hatchery renovation, Kaas says. Primary funding for construction of Phase 1 would come from sale of fishing licenses, Great Lakes salmon stamps, and DNR's federal Sport Fish Restoration grant.

DNR also will use funds from the Fox River environmental restoration settlement for parts of the hatchery that produce fish for restocking Green Bay and surrounding waters. No general purpose tax dollars are being used for this project, Kaas says.



Fabulous fisheries projects

Trout stream access increased

Trout anglers will have nearly five miles of continuous public access to one of south central Wisconsin's popular Class 1 trout fishing streams. In 2004, DNR lands and fisheries staff worked together to acquire 77 acres and about 4,000 feet of frontage on each bank of the upper reaches of Big Spring Creek in Grant and Iowa counties. There is one mile of DNR-managed public trout water above this parcel and another three miles of public easements downstream; this parcel connected the two to allow five miles of continuous public access to one of the region's high quality brook trout streams. The purchase was among the 1,102 acres DNR acquired in fiscal year 2004 for state public fishery areas. - *Doug Haag, real estate specialist, Madison*

Dam changes bring recreation benefits

Anglers, canoeists, boaters, and other recreation users should notice that levels and flows in the lower Flambeau River fluctuate less throughout the day than they did in the past, allowing better paddling, more suitable habitat for fish and better fishing.

The improvements stem from Dairyland Power Cooperative's agreement to change routine operations at the Flambeau Hydroelectric Station, the largest of eight hydropower generating facilities on the Flambeau River. Since its construction in 1953, the station has operated as a peaking facility, storing water in its 1,900-acre reservoir during the night and releasing flow at a higher rate in the morning and evening. This storage and release cycle reduced the amount and the quality of aquatic habitat in the impounded and free-flowing downstream river reaches. As part of the process to renew its license with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Dairyland Power worked with DNR staff to devise an operating regime that would better mimic natural river flows to protect fish, wildlife, and recreational opportunities in the Flambeau River without reducing the total amount of energy generated. The utility has also agreed to make other operating changes at three smaller hydroelectric stations. Dairyland's agreement will restore 15 miles of instream habitat in two free-flowing river segments and 556 acres of reservoir habitat in two impoundments.
- *Jeff Scheirer, fisheries biologist, Park Falls*

Plover River gets extreme makeover

In 2004, DNR, in cooperation with landowners and Trout Unlimited, completed a stream restoration on 5,000 feet of the Plover River in Marathon County from Highway 153 upriver. The river channel had filled up with sediment and widened as a result primarily of past farming practices and logging operations. The work included installing 14 wing deflectors totaling 3,441 feet to narrow and deepen the stream channel, increase water flows, decrease water temperatures and wash away unwanted sediments to expose favorable substrate for possible trout reproduction. Other work included installing two islands and extending one natural island, strategically placing 300 large boulders to provide mid-channel cover for fish, installing logs and other woody debris to provide cover for fish, and restoring flowing springs by cleaning out the fallen tag alder or grass clogging the springs. The partners also installed three plunge pools using small boulders, and installed a sediment trap and seeded and mulched all disturbed areas to prevent sediments washing downstream from the work being done. The work has decreased the stream channel from an average of 78.6 feet wide and 1.28 feet deep to 50 feet wide and 2 feet deep. The stream bottom is now a mixture of sand and gravel, and average water flows have increased. The work substantially increased the amount of overhead and mid-channel cover, created expansive areas of backwater where planting aquatic plants would benefit waterfowl, deer, muskrats, and songbirds as well as reptiles and amphibians. Future stream surveys are planned to evaluate the use of this habitat by trout and we may boost the population by stocking native brook trout in areas previously uninhabitable by trout.
- *Tom Meronek, fisheries biologist, Wausau; Jason Spaeth, fisheries technician, Wisconsin Rapids*

Carp barrier restores clear water, fish habitat

A carp barrier completed in February 2004 to keep large carp from entering Page's Slough on the north side of Lake Poygan in Winnebago County is already improving water clarity and dramatically increasing desirable aquatic plants. Carp root around in bottom sediments for food, making the water cloudy and uprooting plants. The gate was closed in late March 2004 to prevent the passage of carp 18 inches and greater, while allowing all but the largest of game fish to enter the 139-acre Page's Slough. The gate is to be opened in September for the fall and winter. Arthur Techlow, a DNR fisheries biologist on the Lake Winnebago system, led the project, which had a total cost of $115,728. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency contributed $25,000, matched by a DNR Lake Protection Grant of $64,500 sponsored by the Lake Poygan Sportsmen's Club. The club's own contribution covered the balance of the project costs.
- *Carroll Schaal, DNR lakes team leader, Madison*

Bluegill fishery gets break from wastewater

A once thriving bluegill fishery in an isolated backwater of the Upper Mississippi River near La Crescent, Minn., may get a reprieve from wastewater pollution, thanks to years of Department of Natural Resources staff water quality sampling. The La Crosse team's water quality data, along with recent fish and aquatic plant surveys, showed that the backwater habitats were deteriorating from pollutant levels in wastewater discharged by La Crescent's municipal wastewater treatment plant. The data, collected by DNR water quality specialists John Sullivan, Jim Fischer, Terry Dukerschein and other DNR staffers, demonstrated that the isolated backwater area needed to be treated more like a lake than a river when it came to the wastewater allowed to be discharged into it. Unlike rivers and streams, the backwaters didn't have the current to help assimilate the wastewater. Those findings are now spurring changes in how the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency regulates the La Crescent municipal plant; it will face upgrading to meet more restrictive effluent limits or could choose to relocate where they discharge wastewater to a side channel with flowing water. Rerouting the wastewater, along with some additional management measures, will help restore wetland habitat, may help restore the bluegill fishery, and will certainly benefit other aquatic life. Similar long-term monitoring data from the Long Term Resource Monitoring program, which is federally funded but carried out by Wisconsin and other states along the Upper Mississippi, is also sparking changes in how the Village of Stoddard, in Vernon County, operates its wastewater treatment plant.

DNR fisheries technician Cliff Sebero points out the former site of the Hemlock Dam on the Oconto River to Mike Donofrio, DNR fisheries supervisor at Peshtigo. The dam was removed in 2004 and is expected to help improve stream temperatures for brook trout. A secondary dam will be removed in 2005. Photo: Lee Meyers

Oconto River dam removals cool trout water

DNR's Peshtigo fish crews in summer 2004 removed two old logging dams built in the 1880s on the North Branch Oconto River near Lakewood, clearing the way for cooler water temperatures that will benefit native brook trout. DNR fisheries technician Cliff Sebero and fisheries staff at Peshtigo, along with DNR's operations crew for northeastern Wisconsin, worked with the U.S. Forest Service to remove the dams, which were located in the Nicolet National Forest. They plan to do some channel enhancement to complete the project in 2005. Gravel and cobble that had been transported and piled up downstream as a result of the plunge pool created by the dam will be removed in 2005. This two-phased approach to lowering water levels also will allow the banks in the impounded area to stabilize with vegetation, reducing sediment that moves downstream.

The dam removal was fairly controversial when first being considered, as several people used the impounded 1.7 miles of river to duck hunt or fish for northern pike by boat or canoe. Sebero worked with Forest Service staff to conduct several public meetings about the proposed project and help collect data on water temperatures and fish community composition over the past few years before the removal.

This effort will improve water temperatures for native brook trout in the previously impounded reach, and will benefit downstream areas for 5 to 10 miles. This project, much of which was paid for by revenues from sales of the Inland Trout Stamp, recently received an award from the federal government.
- *Lee Meyers, fish expert, DNR Northeastern Region*

Big Muskego undergoes big improvement

For decades, 2,600-acre Big Muskego Lake was a turbid, algae-dominated water generating little fishing or other recreation even after treated sewage stopped flowing into the lake in 1984. DNR and partners in 1995 launched a multi-year reclamation project that began with an 18-month water level drawdown. We removed the carp-dominated fish population, restocked 20 native fish species, enacted restrictive fishing regulations to promote bio-manipulation of algae-grazing zooplankton and constructed a mechanical and electrical carp barrier to prevent carp from re-colonizing the lake. Since the project, we've seen marked improvements in water clarity, our electrofishing surveys are capturing more desirable native fish, and desirable aquatic plants now dominate. Despite a partial winterkill of the fish population and re-colonization by carp, the lake remains in the clear-water state. Recognizing the "new" value of the lake, Big Muskego has been designated as one of the few remaining "Land Legacy" areas in southern Wisconsin, with remaining open space along the lake being preserved cooperatively by the City of Muskego and DNR.
- *Randy Schumacher, fisheries supervisor, Waukesha*

Quick action prevents major fishkill

Anglers can reel in brown and rainbow trout this year from Dougherty Creek in Green County, thanks to round-the-clock efforts by DNR staff, and the help of partners, to prevent 200,000 gallons of liquid manure from reaching the Class 2 trout stream and causing a major fish kill. Although the co-owner of a Green County dairy farm immediately reported the manure spill to authorities after discovering it in November 2004, the manure quickly reached a small, unnamed creek leading to Dougherty Creek. DNR warden Jeff King, fish biologists Don Bush and Kurt Welke, DNR spill coordinator Ted Amman and animal waste investigator Mike Vollrath worked feverishly for two days to dam the unnamed creek in two spots to hold back the manure and to pump it out and prevent it from reaching Dougherty Creek. Commercial waste haulers did the bulk of pumping during daylight hours, but DNR crews stayed overnight to keep pumps running and prevent manure from overtopping the makeshift dams. Help and materials from Green County's Land Conservation and Highway departments and the University of Wisconsin Agricultural Research Station were also critical in the effort.

Turtle Creek gets accessible fishing platform

Barron County has an abundance of trout streams that, until recently, were accessible only to anglers who could walk into them. That changed in summer 2004 with the installation on Turtle Creek near Prairie Farm of a fishing platform that is accessible to disabled anglers. Department of Natural Resources fisheries and lands staff, regional field operations crew, and the Barron County Parks Department, installed the fishing platform. It's the first of what fish manager Heath Benike hopes will eventually be up to six accessible fishing platforms on the creek to allow disabled anglers to enjoy trout fishing and benefit from extensive habitat improvement projects on the creek in recent years.

More than 3,000 feet of habitat restoration has been completed upstream of the platform over the past four years, with more planned. And, in 2004, crews completed restoration work on another 1,000 feet of Turtle Creek to provide overhead cover and refuge for trout, and mid-channel feeding areas. "This project will improve trout densities in Turtle Creek, increase angler success, and provide a unique opportunity for anglers with disabilities," Benike says.

Fabulous fisheries projects

Mississippi River backwater habitat restored

Over the past century, the Mississippi River has dramatically changed due to man-made disturbances, including construction in the 1930s of a series of locks and dams to regulate water levels and allow passage for barges and other watercraft. Since their construction, many island complexes and backwater lakes in the lower portion of each pool were inundated with water or have eroded away due to high water levels. The loss of these backwater lake complexes — critical over-wintering habitat to fish species like bluegill, crappie, and largemouth bass — can hurt these fish populations.

DNR has been working cooperatively with the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and neighboring states to restore aquatic habitat along Wisconsin's "western" coast. More than 40 projects have been completed on Wisconsin's border since 1986, with the majority of funding from the federal government. Two projects are chronicled here — one just completed and another —regarded as one of the "Seven Wonders of Engineering" — is really starting to pay off for anglers.

The Sunfish Lake project in lower Pool 11, near Dickeyville, was completed in June 2004 to re-establish a backwater island complex with isolated wetlands. Eventually, fish will use the restored island complex as over-wintering habitat, and in spring, as a breeding ground and nursery for young fish. The project involved backwater dredging using a crane with a clamshell bucket to obtain sand and mud to construct the island. By summer 2005, most of the water area in the island will be marshy with just a little bit of open water. While the needs for the fish species, like bluegills and bass, have now been met in the area, river managers say it will take up to seven years to re-establish the fishery from fry transported to the area by the Mississippi River's current.

The Stoddard Islands project near Stoddard, Wis., officially known as Pool 8 Islands, Phase II, Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project, similarly aimed to rebuild islands. The project, which encompasses about 600 acres, of which about 300 is high quality overwintering habitat, received a 2004 Award of Excellence from the Corps, and was designated one of the "Seven Wonders of Engineering" by the Minnesota Society of Professional Engineers.

The reconstructed islands break wave action and deflect the river's current, creating excellent habitat conditions for backwater fish species like bluegill and largemouth bass. The vegetation that grows in the area protected by the island provides ample food for migratory waterfowl while the islands restore nesting habitat. Within four years of project completion in 1999, a tremendous winter fishery was starting in an area that previously had zero fishing pressure. Now it's common to see 50 to 75 vehicles parked in the area. Literally hundreds of people fish on nice days all winter long on the backwater, and summer fishing is also very good, helping turn the area into one of the Mississippi River's most heavily fished backwaters on a per acre basis. The testimony to the quality of habitat restored was revealed during fall 2004 sampling when we saw no noticeable decline in the quality of the fish population despite the high year-to-year angling pressure in a relatively small area.

- Patrick Short, fisheries biologist, Prairie du Chien; Jeff Janvrin, Mississippi River habitat specialist, La Crosse

A 2004 DNR project to re-establish a backwater island complex on the Mississippi River near Dickeyville will provide over-wintering habitat, a nursery and a spawning ground for fish in coming years. The island is built from the outside in and is only partly completed in this photo. Photo: Jan Janvrin.

Turning Silver Lake golden again

Teamwork has put Silver Lake near Manitowoc on the road to recovery. The carp-infested, algae-clogged lake has been undergoing a $750,000 restoration for the past several years to improve water clarity, restore the lake's ecological balance and revive panfish and gamefish populations. The Department of Natural Resources is managing the restoration, in partnership with the Manitowoc County Soil and Water Conservation Department, Holy Family Convent, Silver Lake College, the Manitowoc County Lakes Association, the Silver Lake District, Manitowoc Fish and Game, and many other groups and individuals who have donated time and money. DNR's Lake Planning and Protection Grants have provided most of the funding, and Steve Hogler, a DNR fish biologist and Tom Ward, the county conservationist, have led the project.

The effort started in 2001 with construction of an earthen berm to separate Silver Creek from Silver Lake to reroute polluted runoff from entering the lake. Chemical treatments in fall 2003 killed the rough fish such as carp and bullheads, and an alum treatment in spring 2004 aimed to bind up phosphorus in lake bottom sediments to keep it from spurring algae growth. Starting in late spring 2004, DNR began restocking the lake with largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, yellow perch, bluegill, pumpkinseed sunfish and forage minnows. The county and the lakes association are restoring the shoreline in Silver Lake Park by planting natural vegetation and creating three handicapped accessible public shore fishing access points. So far, water quality has improved and the stocked fish survived to the fall in good numbers. The aquatic plants haven't come back as hoped for, and other outstanding questions spur project leaders to caution against declaring success yet. However, this much is clear, says Mary Gansberg, a DNR water resources biologist involved in the project, "The Silver Lake project is an excellent example of the good work that can be done when many people and agencies work together."

Health checks let "kings" rule Lake Michigan

The fantastic chinook fishing anglers have enjoyed for the past four years in Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan owes a lot to Sue Marcquenski, the Department of Natural Resources fish health specialist. Since bacterial kidney disease, BKD, played a major role in chinook disease outbreaks in Lake Michigan in the late 1980s, Marcquenski and scientists at the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (WVDL) in Madison have conducted extensive testing to reduce the risk that BKD would ever again take such a toll on the salmon fishery. This testing begins each year by screening adult salmon at DNR spawning weirs to ensure that eggs from healthy adult salmon are collected, hatched and raised in state hatcheries. Marcquenski removes kidney tissue from fish at each spawning site. The lab tests the tissues, which are part of the 25,000 tests they run annually to assure the health of fish reared at the 13 state hatcheries, and other large adult broodfish from Lake Michigan, Lake Superior and inland waters. In 2004, Marcquenski successfully worked with the lab to adopt new, more sensitive testing that will allow DNR to do a better job of detecting BKD in all fish, and take proactive steps to prevent disease outbreaks from occurring in the hatcheries as well as in Lake Michigan. Marcquenski also is working with the laboratory's scientists to adopt new technologies to detect a bacterial infection of spotted muskies, to detect exotic fish diseases, and to develop new, nonlethal methods for testing long-lived fish such as lake sturgeon.

Shaili Pfeiffer of Madison enjoyed great chinook fishing in 2004 on Lake Michigan.

Go online for maps of public fishing grounds

Anglers and other outdoors enthusiasts can locate all Department of Natural Resources properties open to the public for fishing, hiking, biking, bird-watching, and other activities by using a new Internet mapping program launched in 2004.

The "DNR Managed Lands" Web site can be found online at http//www.dnr.wi.gov/org/land/facilities/dnr_lands_mapping.html.

Users can search for state properties they know by name or look for public lands in a town, county, or region they want to discover. They can select traditional maps showing symbols for roads, highways, bodies of water, and forests, as well as choose aerial photographs and contour maps to get a better sense of a property's vegetation, habitat, and topography. Maps of wildlife areas, public fishing grounds, natural areas, trails, state parks, forests, campgrounds, waterways, and all state lands purchased with Stewardship funds are all available online. The site allows users to create maps for their personal use and save maps as .pdf files to share with friends and family via e-mail. It also links directly to DNR home pages for fisheries management, wildlife management, endangered resources, parks, facilities and lands and forestry for more help planing trips and to buy licenses and permits. The mapping site was designed and developed cooperatively by DNR's Bureau of Facilities and Lands and the Geo Services Section. - *Doug Haag, real estate specialist, Madison*

Stocked ponds offer fall trout fishing

A new stocking program provides fall trout fishing opportunities in Washburn County and has doubled the number of catchable size trout in that county. Seventeen small "fishless" freeze-out lakes on public land in Washburn County Forest are stocked with 2-inch-long brook, rainbow and occasionally brown trout fingerlings right after ice out. The productivity of individual ponds varies, but survival and growth rates are exceptional: almost half of the trout fingerlings survive to be a plump 7 to 12 inches by October. With fall populations of 40 to more than 100 legal trout per acre, these ponds hold about as many catchable size trout as all 100 miles of the county's trout streams.

The stocking program, which receives fish from the state's Osceola and St. Croix fish hatcheries, was started to boost fishing opportunities in the county forest and to put surplus hatchery trout fingerlings to good use. The ponds have been open for fall and winter fishing the last two years, but angler effort has been surprisingly low. Trout fishing is such a spring time tradition, I've been having difficulty convincing anglers to fish in the fall when the trout are the largest and most abundant.

The ponds do require a little effort to find. They are so small — 2 to 10 acres— they aren't on maps. Most don't even have official names. Many require a 10- to 20-minute trail walk in non-motorized parts of the county forest. For location maps and more information, visit Washburn County's Web site, www.co.washburn.wi.us/departments/forestry/info/huntfishwild.htm. - *Larry Damman, fisheries biologist, Spooner*

Trout stream recovering premier status

The Onion River, once the premier trout stream in Sheboygan County, had fallen on hard times for almost a half-century. Most of the springs feeding the stream had been dammed, the banks heavily grazed and the surrounding watershed denuded of trees. The water was barely able to support trout year-round and the fish were only sustained through stocking each spring.

Then the river's luck changed. Restoration began slowly in the mid-1980s when the Department of Natural Resources purchased some land along one of the feeder streams. Local anglers from the Lakeshore Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU) were looking for a project where they were prepared to pump in both money and muscle power. A partnership of the Sheboygan County Conservation Association, the TU chapter and the DNR bought more stream frontage, studied water quality and surveyed both the fish community and aquatic insect life.

In the early 1990s, TU crews, DNR laborers and a private contractor started restoring the stream habitat. Two old fish hatcheries along the river were purchased and at least 15 small dams that had impounded groundwater were removed to restore cold flow to the river. Hatchery trout were replaced with wild strains from Southwestern Wisconsin to restore vigor to the genetic strains of wild fish . Those trout now travel up those small feeder streams to spawn.

Anglers also agreed to control harvesting trout on the upper reaches of the Onion. Upstream of the County E bridges there's a one fish, 15-inch minimum bag limit. The trout population nearly doubled in that reach in just one season and soon lots of rods will be doubling over as this restored waterway and invigorated wild trout get stronger every season. - *John E. Nelson, senior fisheries biologist, Plymouth*

Regional forecasts for fishing 2005

Northern Region

Lake Superior

Spring brings some of the best fishing opportunities of the year in Chequamegon Bay, with anglers trolling for coho and chinook salmon, brown trout, splake, and lake trout, but also catching walleye and northern pike. Because studies indicated that walleye and northern pike were consuming newly stocked brown trout and splake, DNR in 2003 stocked brown trout and splake offshore in hopes of better survival rates and return to anglers' creels. Conservative regulations have created a trophy smallmouth bass fishery in the bay that starts in May/June.

Many tributaries to the lake have excellent steelhead populations in spring although fishing conditions depend on snowmelt and precipitation in April.

Trolling around the Apostle Islands can produce nice catches of lake trout with the average fish exceeding 22 inches. Eighty-eight percent caught are wild fish, indicating that natural reproduction continues to support the Apostle Islands population. As water temperatures cool in the fall, trolling off the mouths of the tributaries can produce good catches of brown trout, chinook and coho salmon. These fish are here before entering the rivers. Fall is still a good time for smallmouth bass and walleye in the bay. Regardless of the season, anglers are encouraged to check with the local sport shops for the latest weather and fishing conditions.

Anglers who catch lake trout with colored tags are encouraged to report the fish's length, tag number, and capture location to the local DNR office. Information gathered from fish "recaptured" by fish biologists during subsequent spawning assessments, or by anglers, teaches fish managers about the lake trout's annual movements, spawning behavior, and growth rates. Recapturing fish previously tagged several times is not uncommon. Last fall, we captured a male lake trout spawning on Gull Island Shoal in the Apostle Islands — the tenth time he had been captured on the shoal since 1982. The fish looked like a colorful porcupine. It had only grown 4 inches from 1982 to 2004 to reach 31.4 inches. Such slow growth — one-fourth inch per year — is not unusual for lake trout, which is well suited for Lake Superior, where water temperatures in some parts rarely exceed 55º F. The species' slow metabolism causes lower growth rates than for fish with higher metabolisms living in warmer environments.

- Michael Seider, fisheries biologist, Bayfield

Florence and Forest counties

Florence and Forest counties are home to 1,085 lakes ranging from small ponds to large lakes and reservoirs; 912 miles of trout streams, and large-river, warm water fisheries found in the lower Brule and Menominee rivers in Florence County. Lake anglers will find good multi-species lakes, with bass and panfish topping the list of the many small to medium-size lakes. For the adventurous canoe or float tube angler, walk-in access bass lakes provide a unique experience; many are on National Forest lands. Since largemouth bass are somewhat overlooked in northern Wisconsin, they can provide plenty of action right through the summer when the walleyes and smallies can be a tough bite. And some of the remote walk-in lakes also hold good numbers of decent-sized bluegills. Trout anglers who just can't wait to wet a line can fish the early catch-and-release season, beginning March 5, in the Pine River in Florence County, or parts of the Peshtigo, Pine, and Rat rivers in Forest County. Both the Peshtigo and Pine are mixed brook and brown trout fisheries, with some trophy-sized browns available. Once the regular trout season opens, many anglers go for the numerous smaller, headwater streams with native brook trout. Others who like to cast a fly can head for the Pine and the Popple, designated "Wild Rivers" by state law. Both rivers hold very nice fish of both species. The cool temperatures we experienced in summer 2004 brought better trout survival to many northeastern Wisconsin trout streams, especially those like the Wild Rivers that normally get quite warm in the summer. Look for good trout fishing in 2005 as a result, assuming normal over-winter survival.

River anglers who aren't after trout might try the lower Brule and Menominee rivers in Florence County. They offer a mixed bag of all the major gamefish in a large river setting, in addition to several reservoirs.

- Bob Young, fisheries biologist, Woodruff

Ashland and Iron counties

The famous Turtle-Flambeau and Gile flowages are probably best known for their walleye and smallmouth bass fisheries. Based on our annual monitoring, the 2005 season is expected to continue to provide top-notch fishing with several strong year-classes entering the fishery.

Anglers should not overlook some of the smaller walleye waters in these counties, including many which have had a special regulation allowing possession of one walleye over 14 inches since 1997. Some of these waters are: Spider, Echo, and Springstead Lakes in Iron County; and Gordon, Spillerberg and Upper Clam Lakes in Ashland County. Anglers recently report improved fishing in terms of numbers and size structure of walleye as a result of this regulation. Several lakes have a slot or 18 inch length limit that also have resulted in improved numbers of better-sized fish. Some of these waters include Boot and Grand Portage lakes in Iron County and Mineral Lake in Ashland County. Thorough evaluations of these special regulations will be completed in the near future to determine the most appropriate regulation for each lake.

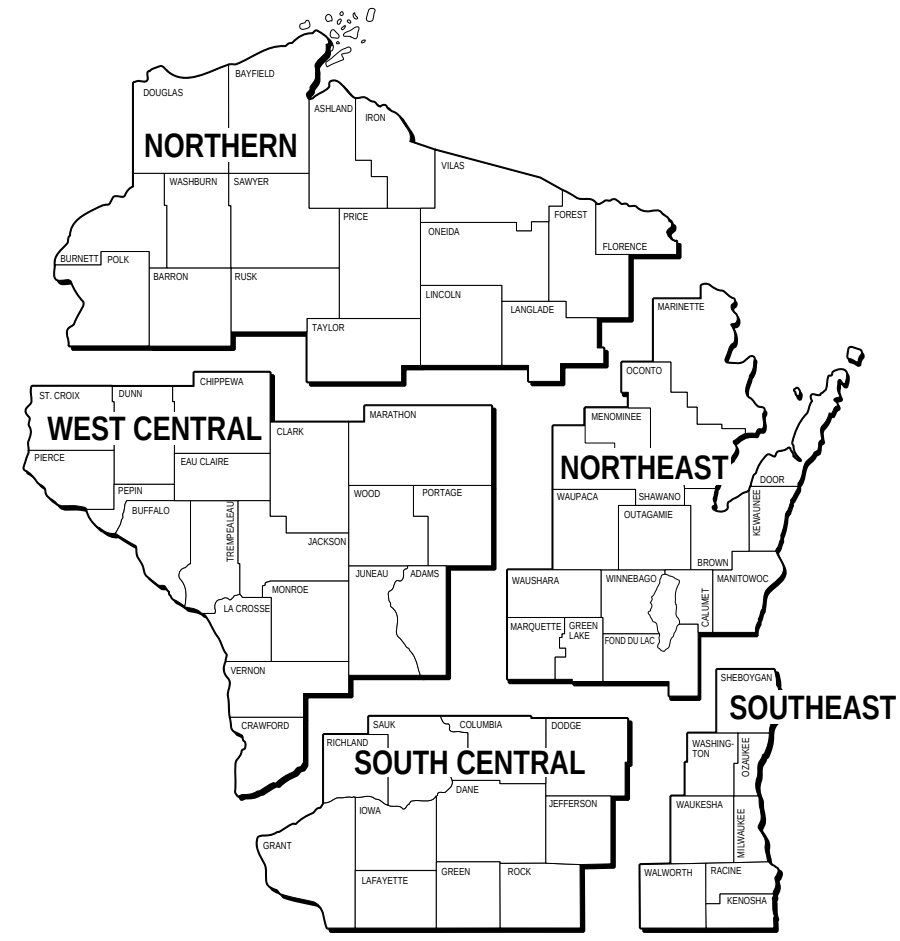
Musky angling opportunities are numerous and a recent stocking evaluation has shown that many of these populations are reproducing naturally in the absence of stocking. Trophy-sized fish continue to be reported by many anglers fishing the smaller 100- to 300-acre lakes. Our evaluations have shown that larger flowages require stocking if a musky fishery is to be maintained, and we continue to stock these waters on an alternate-year basis.

Largemouth and smallmouth bass populations are markedly improved over 20 years ago based on recent surveys showing strong bass recruitment. The larger rivers support superb smallmouth bass fishing that few anglers take advantage of. Be sure to consult your regulation pamphlet before fishing these counties as most waters are under special harvest regulations in an effort to improve your angling success and fishing quality.

- Jeff Roth, fisheries biologist, Mercer

Bayfield and Douglas counties

Walleye population estimates on Middle and Upper Eau Claire lakes in Bayfield County in 2004 indicate a stable but low-density walleye populations with good size structure. Upper Eau Claire Lake had 2 adult walleyes per 1 acre with an average length of 17.3 inches. Middle Eau Claire Lake had a higher density — 4.6 adult walleyes per 1 acre — with a smaller size structure, an average length of 15.1 inches. Upper Eau Claire Lake will have a muskellunge recapture survey completed in 2005 to determine their abundance. Middle and Upper Eau Claire lakes are great examples of the two common types of walleye fisheries in northwestern Wisconsin. Like Diamond Lake, Lake Owen and Red Lake, the Upper Eau Claire has low walleye density but excellent growth and size structure that makes these waters great candidates to try for trophy walleye. Middle Eau Claire Lake, like Namekagon Lake and the Pike chain of lakes, supports high walleye densities but slower growth and smaller size structure, making it a great candidate for good fishing action and a meal to take home.



The South Fork of the White River received habitat improvement work in summer 2004 that included installing logs to provide cover and increase instream habitat complexity. The Wild Rivers Chapter of Trout Unlimited funded the project, which DNR fisheries crews from Brule and Superior and volunteer help from Trout Unlimited completed. DNR completed a second year of population estimates for brown trout on the White River in 2004 and began the first year of creel surveys, with another year to follow in 2005.

- Scott Toshner, fisheries biologist, Brule

Polk and Barron counties

Based on 2004 fisheries surveys, another banner year for fishing is expected in Barron and Polk counties. Preliminary results from an evaluation of a 26-inch minimum length limit with a daily bag limit of two for northern pike on Long Lake near Centuria, in Polk County, indicates that the numbers are down slightly but the quality and size structure have improved considerably. Most importantly, there are a healthy number of larger northern pike 32 to 40 inches.

A muskellunge population estimate on Deer Lake found the overall population has decreased slightly but the size structure has improved considerably. Two likely reasons are a 40-inch minimum length limit and a reduction in stocking densities over the past decade, which allow fish to grow faster and larger.

Our comprehensive surveys on Pipe Lake in Polk County and Lower Turtle Lake in Barron County found that the largemouth bass fisheries have increased over the last decade while the walleye fisheries have declined. This finding was not unexpected since such relationships have been seen on many area lakes over the past 10 to 15 years. Additional studies, as well as, management actions, may be taken to try to improve walleye densities in each lake if public support for those actions is positive.

Sampling on a few dozen small streams in northern Barron County showed that Moosear, Tuscobia, Engle and Pokegama creeks have healthy brook trout fisheries. Brown trout numbers were down slightly on the Brill and Yellow rivers, but the lower densities are resulting in larger-than-average fish and both streams have the potential to produce trophy browns.

Fall 2004 surveys found high walleye reproduction on Red Cedar Lake, moderate on Silver Lake, and low on Upper Turtle, Lower Turtle, Montanis, Poskin and Granite lakes. Strong populations of largemouth bass, northern pike and panfish were found on almost every lake sampled.

Coldwater habitat restoration activities continued on an additional 1,000 feet of Turtle Creek in southwestern Barron County, and a fishing platform was constructed to provide anglers with disabilities an opportunity to fish for trout.

- Heath Benike, fisheries biologist, Barron

Rusk and Sawyer counties

The most comprehensive fall survey schedule in history took us to Sand, Nelson, Black Dan, Island, Windigo, Ashegon, Christner, Round, Chippewa Flowage, Blueberry, Chetac, and Hayward lakes, all in Sawyer County and Potato Lake in Rusk County. Streams visited this summer included the Couderay, Wiergor, and Thornapple systems. In general, the fall surveys indicated very poor reproduction/survival of young of most species, which given the late spring and subsequent "non-summer," is about what would have been predicted. Walleye reproduction in most wild walleye lakes and survival of 2-inch fingerlings in many stocked lakes followed that general pattern. Notable exceptions: phenomenal walleye reproduction in Grindstone Lake, Sawyer County; very good survival of 2-inch fingerlings and/or wild young-of-year (yoy) in Chetac and Sand lakes, Sawyer County; good hatches of yoy yellow perch in Sand, Chetac, Nelson lakes. That's good news since perch are the base of the fish food web and probably explains good walleye survival in first two lakes. Indications from very small-size of those perch are that spawning/hatch must have been unusually late this year. Evaluation of the experimental brown trout stocking program in Round Lake, Sawyer County, showed that trophy objectives are being met. Brown trout from the first year of stocking, 2003, have already achieved the 18-inch

minimum size. Expect big things from this newly established two-story fishery in 2005. On the stream stocking/evaluation side: the stocking of wild strain Timber Coulee brown trout in Couderay River, Devils Creek (Rusk), and Big and Little Weirgor systems in Sawyer and Rusk counties appears to be working where previously, stocking domestic strain in these streams had been a near-total failure. Ongoing results of musky stocking evaluations continue to suggest that stocking large numbers of large fingerlings may not be as critical to sustaining the fishery as it once was, when the fishery was overexploited and before re-establishment of old/large size/age structure.

- Frank B. Pratt, senior fisheries biologist, Hayward

Oneida County

Anglers reported inconsistent open-water walleye action because the water stayed cold and the weather never seemed to stop changing. Bass and musky fishing was a little better, although the summer bite was more typical of cooler fall patterns. How does this affect 2005? Poor fishing in 2004 should translate into more fish surviving to provide action another year.

The bulk of the walleye fishery will be provided by bumper year classes from 2001 and 2002. Walleye hatched in 2001 will reach 15 inches during 2005, while 3-year-olds average about 12 to 13 inches in northern Wisconsin. DNR conducted two walleye population surveys in Oneida County during 2004. Booth Lake (stocked) and Indian Lake (natural reproduction) both contained low-density walleye populations with very good fish size. Look for perch patterns to produce in many lakes, as fish key in on a strong 2004 year class.

Late winter and spring crappie fishing was very difficult in 2004, so many crappies should have survived another year to provide action in 2005. On the bluegill scene, some lakes experienced a mild winterkill in 2004. On top of that, bluegill and pumpkinseed reproduction was poor to nonexistent because of cold water temperatures. For these prolific panfish, less is more. Fewer mouths to feed should produce good panfish growth rates — and larger fish — for a couple years in thinned-out populations.

Bass reproduction has been strong during recent years, and we should continue to see quality bass fishing during 2005. Largemouth bass were the dominant game fish in Booth Lake, while Indian Lake had moderate populations of both largemouth and smallmouth bass with good numbers of quality-size fish.

Northern pike provide consistent action in many lakes. We found a large population of northern pike in our survey of Indian Lake, but most were less than 20 inches. Booth Lake has a strong muskellunge population, but only 6 percent were 40 inches or longer.

For the second consecutive year, none of the Class 3 trout water in Oneida County will be stocked due to hatchery budget constraints. Rainbow trout in Squash Lake is the only trout stocking approved for 2005. Look for trout in streams that support natural reproduction. - *John Kubisiak, fisheries biologist, Rhinelander*

Langlade County

Spring pond dredging was completed on Maxwell Springs last summer but it will take several years for the pond to fully saturate with trout and reach its new potential with the improved habitat and increased living space for trout. In 2005, we'll dredge Woodboro Springs in Oneida County.

We completed habitat improvement work on a section of the East Branch Eau Claire River just downstream from State Highway 45 last summer. The Antigo Chapter of Trout Unlimited and Northwoods Sportsmen's Club provided labor, materials, and funds to complete this project.

McGee Lake remains a nice place to go to take home some pan-sized bass. Anglers are encouraged to harvest all bass up to their daily limit of five from the 23-acre spring pond, which has become infested with largemouth bass to the detriment of its native brook trout and stocked rainbow trout.

We'll be studying trout in the Wolf River again this summer, tagging up to 3,000 7- to 9-inch brown trout before stocking. Please report all tagged fish caught to the Antigo DNR Service Center (715) 623-4190 and note the catch date and location, tag number and color, length of trout, whether the fish was released or harvested, and what it was caught on. Last year we implanted 23 radio transmitters in 11- to 20-inch brown trout we surveyed from the Wolf River. We'll continue to follow these fishes' movements until the batteries expire sometime early in summer 2005 to gather information to help us better manage the Wolf River system. Look for summary reports and meetings in fall and winter 2005-06.

Surveys done in 2004 on Jack, Mary, Rose, and Sawyer lakes revealed that Jack Lake has a very nice largemouth bass and bluegill fishery with good numbers and sizes of each. Stocked rainbow trout are also doing very well. Mary is a good largemouth bass, bluegill, and perch lake. Rose and Sawyer have good naturally reproducing populations of walleye, some excellent largemouth and smallmouth bass fishing opportunities, and some nice panfish.

Our fall electrofishing surveys on seven lakes managed partly in the past for walleye found low levels of natural walleye reproduction on Rose and Sawyer lakes, and no natural walleye reproduction on Lower Clear, Moccasin, Otter, Rolling Stone, or Upper Post lakes this year.

Last year, brook trout surveys on one section of the East Branch of the Eau Claire River were up 10 percent over the long-term average. We estimated almost 3,300 4-inch and larger brook trout per mile, the highest since 2002's estimate of 3,800 per mile. We see fluctuations in trout numbers from year to year, likely in response to environmental conditions such as the moderate drought of recent years. With favorable stream flow conditions and temperatures, however, trout numbers in 2005 may rebound to the record high levels of 1993-95 when we estimated more than 4-5,000 4-inch and larger brook trout per mile in this section of stream! In 2005, lake surveys will be done on Enterprise, Moccasin, Otter, and McGee lakes, and if weather and time permit, trout surveys on Garski Flowage, Krause Spring, Rabe Lake, Shadick Springs, and Saul Springs.

– Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo

DNR fish biologist Heath Benike displays a 41-inch northern pike captured during spring 2004 electrofishing surveys on Pipe Lake in Polk County.

Chris Zunker holds a lake trout caught in a spring survey on Chequamegon Bay. Spring brings some of the best fishing opportunities of the year in the bay. Photo: Stephen Schram

Lincoln County

Comprehensive 2004 fish surveys on Crystal and Muskellunge lakes found low density, high quality walleye populations consistent with stocked populations. We estimated walleye populations at 0.6 fish per acre in each lake, with most over the legal size of 15 inches. We found good numbers and sizes of largemouth bass in both lakes. Muskellunge are providing a nice fishery in Muskellunge Lake; most were over the legal size of 34 inches. Muskellunge are not present in Crystal Lake but smallmouth bass are in low numbers, comprising about 10 percent of the total bass population. There are some nice crappies in both lakes, but the bulk of the bluegill populations are 3- to 6-inch fish. Muskellunge Lake has some nice perch right now. It will be a few years before the good perch hatch we saw in Crystal Lake last year has a chance to grow to a harvestable size. The northern pike populations in both lakes are made up of mostly 15- to 25-inch fish.

We also did survey work on Harrison Lake and Merrill Flowage. Harrison Lake suffered a moderate winterkill in 2003-04, but enough adult northern pike survived to repopulate the lake, and bluegill, perch, and bullheads, as well as some minnow species, pulled off large hatches and should quickly repopulate the lake. Installation of an aeration system would be the best and most economical solution to the chronic winterkill situation on this lake. Merrill Flowage has very good self-sustaining populations of walleye, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, northern pike, and muskellunge. The panfish populations are similar to other flowages in this area: low density and high quality.

Fall electrofishing surveys on waters managed partly in the past for walleye found average to good natural reproduction on Merrill and Spirit River flowages. Tug Lake had a low level of natural walleye reproduction, and no natural reproduction was found on Crystal, Muskellunge, Pesabic, Somo, Squaw, and Seven Island lakes.

Stream habitat improvement work was completed in summer 2004 on the lower Prairie River upstream of Merrill and downstream of County Highway C. Boulders were placed in the stream for fish habitat and channel shaping was done through a half-mile stretch. More work is on tap for 2005, with the Wisconsin Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited helping with funding and lining up easements with private landowners to do the work.

Last summer, trout numbers in Prairie River rebounded from low levels in 2003, good news and likely a response to better stream flows and cooler water temperatures. In one river section we estimated 2,200 4-inch and larger trout per mile, a 19 percent improvement from 2003 but still 42 percent below the long-term average. We hope 2005 will bring favorable flows and temperatures and even higher trout numbers to the Prairie River and other trout streams.

– Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo

Price, Rusk, and Taylor counties and some Sawyer County

Anglers should find fast fishing action for muskies and walleyes on Butternut Lake in northwestern Price County and southeastern Ashland County. Creel survey results from 2003 and 2004 showed anglers' catch rate for muskies and walleyes was high but harvested fish of both species were smaller than desired. DNR estimated population density at 1 adult musky per acre and 31 walleyes per acre in 2003. The walleye population had many 8- to 12-inch fish, and few longer than 15 inches. Likewise, most muskies in Butternut Lake measured between 28 and 38 inches and few exceeded the preferred length of 38 inches. Often when fish densities are high, growth rates decline due to competition for food and habitat between fish within the same and different species. Anglers can help restore balance and improve the size structure by focusing some harvest on smaller muskies and walleyes and keeping limited numbers of large walleye, muskies, yellow perch and black crappies. Keeping smaller fish also is consistent with advice to reduce exposure to environmental contaminants.

Fishing for smallmouth bass on the Flambeau River in Price, Sawyer, and Rusk counties should be excellent again in 2005 with 2004 surveys showing a high proportion of large, plump fish.

Good sturgeon fishing is expected again on the Flambeau and Chippewa rivers next fall. Future prospects for a sturgeon fishery with some harvest relies heavily on carefully monitoring this long-lived and late-maturing population, so anglers can help by registering their catch and by provide fins and entrails upon request so fishery staff can determine the age and gender of harvested fish.

Fall 2004 electrofishing sample in Lake Flambeau, locally known as Dairyland Reservoir, included many young walleyes. The results indicate successful natural reproduction and survival through the summer, and suggest that the lake's tradition of good walleye fishing will continue uninterrupted in four to five years when the "Class of 2004" reaches catchable size.

Along with excellent brook trout fishing on the South Fork Main Creek, anglers can now expect new opportunities to catch brown trout near Ingram, where fingerlings stocked there in 2003 should be approaching catchable size this year.

Survey information from recent years points to a continued trend of very good to excellent fishing for largemouth bass in many Taylor County lakes, including Rib Lake, North Spirit Lake, and Chequamegon Waters Flowage (Miller Dam). Trout anglers should still find excellent trout fishing in the Rib River.

- Jeff Scheirer, fisheries biologist, Park Falls

Northeast Region

Door County

Lake Michigan and Green Bay, including tributary streams - There's little doubt that summer 2004 creel surveys will show the highest sport angler harvest of chinook salmon from Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan since the late 1980s. The fishery has been phenomenal the last four years, even with Wisconsin and other Great Lakes states stocking 25 percent *fewer* fish since 1999 to match the forage base. It's important for sport anglers to recognize that the past three summers of fishing have been exceptional and that this level of success may not be sustainable. In fact, there are some early warning signs that another decrease in chinook stocking may be warranted, among them declining average size of fish caught and decreasing average length and weight at age. Biologists from all jurisdictions on the lake are gathering this winter to compare data and make recommendations.

Other changes in the Lake Michigan fishery included the elimination of brook trout stocking, a decrease in brown trout fingerlings targeted for the big lake due to budget reductions, and reduction in steelhead stocking in 2004 because of reduced flows at the Kettle Moraine Springs Hatchery. However, improved flows at that hatchery will increase steelhead stocked in 2005.

Success in the lake trout fishery has declined recently, likely due to the 40 percent reduction in total lake trout stocked since 1995. Stocking was reduced to allow federal hatcheries to raise fewer but larger and healthier yearling lake trout but that apparently has not worked. In the future, federal hatcheries will raise more fish for stocking by reducing the average size of each yearling while still producing the healthiest fish possible.

With the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers forecasting below average water levels again, many smaller boat launch access points will probably be unusable and anglers should check with local municipalities before going to a particular launch.

On a positive note: a new boat launch on the recently acquired Carmody property on Little Sturgeon Bay will provide improved boater access to this popular fishing area while a recently renovated boat ramp at Bues Point in Moonlight Bay has improved access to the Lake Michigan side of the peninsula. The Stone Quarry Park launch at the mouth of Sturgeon Bay will probably be closed from July through the rest of 2005 for expansion. These improvements are accomplished through a mix of federal Sport Fishing Restoration and DNR's Stewardship funding programs, and with local citizens' support and cooperation.

Low lake level and low stream flows impacted salmon runs in fall 2004, but the 3/4-mile long pipeline state fisheries crews installed in 2000 enabled fish to reach the wier and DNR to collect enough chinook eggs at Strawberry Creek for the chinook stocking program.

A large northern pike spawning run — the beneficiary of good snow melt and plentiful spring rains — may have produced a bumper crop of young northern that should enter the fishery in a few years. Sturgeon Bay, Little Sturgeon Bay, Rowley Bay and Detroit Harbor on Washington Island remain the hot spots for pike anglers.

Although invasive aquatic species may pose a problem for the Green Bay smallmouth population, bass reproduction seems to be good and a variety of age classes and size fish are present. We expect fishing success to be very good.

About 1,500 Great Lakes spotted musky fingerlings and 25 yearlings were stocked in Little Sturgeon, and 2,100 fingerling and 25 yearling musky were stocked in Sturgeon Bay as part of the decade-long effort to re-establish reproducing populations of this native species in Green Bay. Reported catches of 40- to 50-inch muskies are increasing.

Sturgeon Bay/Little Sturgeon Bay walleye populations received an important supplemental stocking in 2003 when state hatcheries delivered 163,200 walleye fingerlings, divided between the two bays. An additional 12,500 fingerlings reared from fry hatched in the mobile hatchery operated by the Green Bay Area Great Lakes Sport Fishing Club in Little Sturgeon were also stocked, mostly in Little Sturgeon. That brings the total stocked in this area during the past two years to more than 425,000 fingerlings. A combined several hundred thousand fry also were released from the Green Bay Club's mobile hatchery and one operated by the Door County Chapter of Walleyes for Tomorrow, also in Little Sturgeon. In a few years these young fish will add substantial numbers to the already good adult population that includes many fish larger than 23 inches.

- Paul Peeters, fisheries biologist, and Mike Toneys, fisheries supervisor, Sturgeon Bay

Kewaunee and Manitowoc counties

Lake Michigan and tributary streams - Anglers can hook steelhead, brown trout or northern pike in the tributaries after the spring melt. Fishing in harbors and off piers can be very productive with anglers harvesting a variety of species including many nearshore rainbow. Anglers looking for a different fishing experience may want to try dip netting suckers or smelt as they migrate upstream.

Summer should again see anglers catching good numbers of chinook salmon and other Lake Michigan trout and salmon. Chinook fishing should be equally as exciting in 2005 as in recent years. With the reduction in steelhead stocking, steelhead angling could be slower than in past years, but if favorable wind patterns develop, steelhead fishing could still be exciting. If conditions do not permit fishing on Lake Michigan, try fishing for very good populations of smallmouth bass in the larger rivers.

As summer ends and fall begins, fishing near shore and off piers should be very good with mixed catches of chinook salmon, domestic rainbow trout and brown trout. With the onset of fall, spawning migrations begin and if lake level and stream flows are good, fishing should be excellent in the Manitowoc, East and West Twin and Kewaunee rivers. For a little more solitude, try fishing smaller streams such as Stony Creek, Silver Creek or Fischer Creek.

-Steve Hogler, fisheries biologist, Mishicot

Calumet, Door, Kewaunee and Manitowoc inland lakes and rivers

Northern pike and panfish anglers should have good success in catching these fish during the ice-fishing season on local lakes. Anglers also may target large northern pike on local tributary streams during late winter, but anyone doing so should use extreme care when fishing on these streams. Black crappie, bluegill, and yellow perch are always a good bet early in the open water season, with largemouth bass fishing improving later in the summer. A comprehensive fish survey completed on Kangaroo Lake in Door County in 2004 captured a good variety of fish species. Electrofishing surveys were conducted one night on a number of other lakes and they indicate that in general, local fish populations are fair.

Inland trout fishing will be much reduced in 2005 compared to previous years because trout stocking in local lakes and rivers has been discontinued. The best bet for inland trout fishing would be in the West Twin River near State Highway 147 where a local sport club stocks brown trout. - *Steve Hogler, fisheries biologist, Mishicot*

Winnebago System

(Lower Wolf and upper Fox rivers, Lakes Winnebago, Butte des Morts, Winneconne and Poygan)

Spring river flows returned to more typical levels on the Winnebago system in April 2004, creating very good spawning conditions as walleye made their annual "run" out of Lake Winnebago and into the flooded marshes they have used for centuries.

DNR and volunteer crews were able to capture, tag and collect data on almost 8,600 walleye from around the system, a new record. Males averaged 16.3 inches and 1.7 pounds; almost a quarter were 18 inches or larger, and just under half were under 16 inches. This is due to the influx of young males from the large 2001 year class, which were up the river in great numbers as first year spawners.

Females averaged 22.7 inches and 5.17 pounds, up from last year. Unlike the males, the 2001 females won't be mature until spring 2006. More than half were 22.5 inches or larger, and a quarter were 24 inches or larger! Aging of a sub-sample of females showed 13 different year classes in the spawning stock, with six of those years each representing 5 percent or more of the spawning stock. The more year classes contributing to the spawning stock, the healthier the fish population.

In 13 years of working on the river, I don't remember ever seeing as many large fish as this spring. It was fantastic! And there doesn't seem to be an end in sight to the good fishing. The 2004 hatch of walleye was the third largest recorded since trawling surveys began in 1986. If there is even average survival of these young walleye, they will provide good fishing out to 2012 and beyond.

Good walleye growth rates should also continue, based on trawling surveys in August 2004 that showed a robust food base. All things considered, the walleye population in the Winnebago system is in excellent shape.

Bass - Largemouth and smallmouth bass fishing continues to be good. Bass anglers reported catching 3,237 bass during permitted tournaments in 2004, with largemouth ranging from 14 to 20.4 inches, and smallmouth from 14.4 to 19.9 inches. Eighty percent of the largemouth are under 16 inches; only about 3 percent of the largemouth were over 18 inches. Regardless, good numbers of smaller fish should keep bass anglers interested.

The Little Wolf and Embarrass rivers offer some good summer bronzeback action. Smallies have also really taken off on Lake Winnebago as well.

Northern pike - Northern pike numbers remain good. Fyke nets set in Van Dyne Creek and the tributary to the bay south of Streich's Point (known as the seaplane base), captured limited numbers of fish — 123 — but the fish were significantly larger than those from the upriver Lakes of Butte des Mort and Poygan. For example, females ranged from 23.6 to 40.5 inches and averaged 32.5 inches, compared to females from upriver lakes that averaged 25 inches. Northern pike are not targeted as heavily by anglers on Lake Winnebago, which, combined with a healthy forage base, probably explains the differences. High spring water levels are responsible for a phenomenal northern pike hatch of young in 2004 on the Upriver Lakes, and anglers will likely start seeing 10- to 15-inchers in 2005, but they will not reach the legal harvest length of 26 inches until 2008 or 2009. The spotted muskellunge stocked the past three years have not quite reached the 34-inch minimum length limit and should be carefully released, if hooked.

Panfish and Whitebass - Bluegill and perch have continued to do well with the increase of rooted aquatic vegetation over the last few years. August assessment trawling showed that yellow perch had the largest recorded year class since at least 1986. In fact, three of the last four years have been the highest... by a lot! So for perch anglers, things are pretty good and looking even better for the future.

- Kendall Kamke, senior fisheries biologist, Oshkosh

Shawano and Waupaca counties

Shawano Lake will continue to provide excellent largemouth bass and panfish angling opportunities, and the musky fishery has continued to expand with good numbers of large muskies. Fall boomshocking surveys indicate another poor year for walleye natural reproduction. Anglers can expect most of the walleye action to consist of the remaining fish produced from the last strong year class — 1998.

In 13 years of working on the Wolf River, DNR fish biologist Kendall Kamke says he's never seen as many large walleye as fisheries crews hauled in in spring 2004 during annual surveys on the Winnebago system.

Fall shocking surveys on small lakes indicated good numbers of largemouth bass adults and juveniles. Panfish numbers and size appeared to be average.

Normal to above normal flows on Shawano and Waupaca county trout streams in 2004 should benefit trout populations in 2005. The Radley Creek Fishery area, located in southern Waupaca County, has several miles of public access and supports a high quality brown trout fishery with good numbers of trout 9 to12 inches. The Waupaca River, one of the more popular fly-fishing rivers in the area, has a variety of hatches. One extremely popular and sometimes overlooked one is the white mayfly (*Ephoron leukon* for you flyfishing aficionados) hatch in July-August, which occurs near evening and can really bring out the large fish. The Little Wolf River Fishery Area is one of the more scenic rivers in the area that supports a healthy population of brook trout from 9 to 12 inches.

Catfishing in the Wolf River was spotty in 2004 due to colder temperatures and higher flows in May and June. Since 2001, DNR has been conducting extensive surveys in order to address concerns over declining numbers and size of flathead catfish. During spring surveys, DNR crews captured and tagged 490 flathead catfish and surgically implanted 16 flatheads with radio tags to track seasonal movement and habitat use. Interestingly, preliminary tracking information shows tremendous seasonal movement (as great as 50+ miles) with a large percentage of flatheads overwintering in Lake Poygan. Anglers catching and keeping tagged fish are asked to return the tag and fishing information to the address on the tag.

– Al Niebur, fisheries biologist, Shawano

Lower Fox River and lower Green Bay (Brown County)

Fall surveys found an abundance of walleye, an indication that walleye fishing should be excellent on the Fox River and lower Green Bay during 2005 and many years into the future. Nearly 4,300 adult walleye were captured from the Fox River, with many from the strong 2001 year class and 16 to 20 inches long. Some larger walleye up to 27 inches were also captured. Our lower Green Bay and lower Fox River index shocking this fall turned up an average amount of young-of-the-year walleye, indicating that another year class of walleye was produced during 2004.

The Great Lakes strain muskellunge reintroduction program continues to grow and excite musky anglers. We captured musky up to 46 inches in length during 2004 fall shocking surveys on the Fox River. The Fox River in 2005 should once again provide ample musky fishing opportunities for anglers to catch one of these very large fish close to home.

Anglers successfully target northern pike and yellow perch during spring months and smallmouth bass and catfish during summer. During May and June, fishing in shal-

low nearshore areas for large drum, channel catfish, and carp is a great way to get kids interested in fishing – lots of action with some huge fish! Cool fall waters can provide a mixed catch of fish that can include walleye, chinook salmon, musky, or even whitefish.

Anglers catching and keeping tagged fish are asked to return the tag and fishing information (date, location, water temp, length, weight, etc.) to the address on the tag. Anglers who practice catch and release should leave the tag in the fish, note the tag number, and send the information to the address on the tag, give us a call (920-448-5140), or send an e-mail (Kevin.Kapuscinski@dnr.state.wi.us). The information we collect from anglers through tag returns is vital for effective management of the fishery.

–Rod Lange, fisheries technician, and Kevin Kapuscinski, fisheries biologist, Green Bay

Marinette and Oconto counties

Outlying waters of Green Bay – Yellow perch surveys during 2003 showed the best year class on record for young yellow perch and a good year class also was observed in 2004. Due to 2003's high numbers, it's likely these fish will grow slow and not enter in the sport fishery until 2006. However, there is potential for some good fishing for yellow perch starting in 2005 with the 2002 year class entering into the fishery and some older, larger, 1998 fish still present.

Brown trout fishing has been on the decline even with continued stocking efforts; concerns over stocking locations in the Menominee and Oconto rivers that may be affecting the brown trout survival are being addressed. The low lake water levels that still exist will most likely keep the annual spring run of spawning steelhead at low levels. Chinook returns should increase again, depending on water levels in fall 2005, at Little River in Marinette County as fish were stocked in this location in 2001-2004 after a couple years of not being stocked due to low water levels.

Spotted muskellunge continue to be stocked in the Menominee and Peshtigo rivers and anglers report catching fish over 40 inches and up to 50+ inches. Walleye fishing in the Menominee River and surrounding area of Green Bay has been good for the past few years, especially during the spring spawning run. 2005 should also bring good walleye fishing to the area. Efforts are being made to reduce the confusion over the walleye sport fishing regulations between the Menominee River and the bay of Green Bay in both Michigan and Wisconsin especially during the spring.

- Mike Donofrio, Fisheries Supervisor, Peshtigo

Inland lakes and streams - Caldron and High Falls flowages on the Peshtigo River are expected to provide good muskie fishing, with the potential to provide a trophy or two. Northern pike populations on the flowages are also in good shape, as are large and smallmouth bass populations.

Lake Noquebay provides anglers with a chance to catch quality-size bluegill and black crappie. Good populations of largemouth bass, northern pike and smaller populations of walleye and musky offer a diverse and challenging inland lake fishing experience.

This area is also well known for the miles of quality trout water which attract the adventurous angler. A logging dam removal project carried out in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service in the Lakewood area on the North Branch Oconto River should improve trout fishing there. There has been increased emphasis on beaver control and removal of their dams from trout streams by DNR crews, which keeps these steams cold and flowing freely, providing hundreds of miles of excellent trout habitat in this area. Habitat protection and improvement, combined with the fishing regulations, provide the trout enthusiast with a variety of opportunities, from the chance to catch a meal of trout to an enjoyable catch and release experience.

– Justine Hasz, fisheries biologist, Peshtigo

South Central Region

Mendota Lake - A great year-round producer of quality fish, Lake Mendota offers a wide variety of fishing opportunities. The lake offers true trophy potential for northern pike, especially during the winter tip-up season. Most of the biggest fish are taken from weedy shallow areas in or near University Bay. Mendota's 18-inch, three-fish bag limit allows the majority of walleye to spawn at least one time, while producing larger-than-average catches.

Smallmouth anglers have good success in deeper water near Governors Island, Maple Bluff, and along the eastern shore. Due to the relatively small percentage of shallow, weedy areas, largemouth bass are not abundant but individuals exceeding 20 inches are present.

Perch are a year-round favorite. Fall shocking runs sampled a surprising number of young-of-year perch in 2004, which could turn into a population comeback in the distant future.

Bluegills can be found in most of the lake's shallow areas, with larger individuals common along deep weed edges adjacent to cover. Other favorites include white bass fishing near Maple Bluff, especially during the summer spawn. Often overlooked, channel catfish can be found in spring near Sixmile Creek and Cherokee Marsh. During the rest of the year, these fish can be found sprinkled throughout the lake at any depth, making them hard to target but a pleasant surprise if hooked.

Monona Lake - Monona is best known locally for its tremendous largemouth bass fishery. Highest densities can be found in Squaw, Monona, and Turville bays, but the downtown shoreline also holds many nice fish. Monona also contains a robust musky fishery, rivaling northern Wisconsin waters for numbers and quality size. A spring 2004 musky population estimate determined roughly .5 adult fish per acre, or about 1,600 adult fish. A 45-inch musky size limit enacted in 2004, along with good habitat and abundant forage, gives Monona true trophy potential. During our two-year survey, good numbers of 40+ inch fish were netted and tagged with fish-specific numbers. Musky can be found throughout the lake.

As a result of Monona's high bass density, bluegill numbers are positively kept in check. Out of the four-lake chain, Monona offers the most frontage and habitat for shore fishing. Whether you're looking for action or larger fish, the south, south west area of the lake offers bluegill, crappie and perch.

Walleye, smallmouth bass and northern pike, although not targeted by most anglers, represent underutilized sport. Walleye can be found running up the Yahara River and along John Nolen Drive in the spring and fall. Smallmouth bass have been caught in deep water rocky drop-offs near the eastern shore. Fish well over 20 inches and 5 pounds are starting to become more common. Even though musky size limits are 45 inches, a robust number of northern pike cruise the shallows of Monona. A liberal size limit of 26 inches makes northern pike a favorite for tip-up fishing.

Waubesa and Kegonsa lakes - Waubesa sports excellent numbers of legal size walleyes. Musky, although not common in the lake, are present with the majority greater than 35 inches. Fall 2004 shocking surveys showed good numbers of bluegill in the 7-9 inch range, with impressive catches of perch up to 9 inches. Most panfish effort occurs in the northern half of Lake Waubesa and areas around the dredge hole in Upper Mud Lake. While Upper Mud supports good panfish numbers, this area also harbors good northern pike fishing early in the year, especially during ice fishing. In the same way Upper Mud is the primary northern pike producer for Waubesa, Lower Mud fuels Lake Kegonsa's pike fire. The shallow, well vegetated water provides excellent spawning habitat. Kegonsa is also heavily stocked with walleye. Large fish are not common, but legal size fish can be found near the Yahara River inlet and along the northern shore bordering Centennial State Park. Kegonsa has also been producing fine panfish numbers in recent years. Anglers drift baits in deeper water in fall for nice catches of sizable bluegill and crappie.

Wingra Lake - This 340-acre, slow-no-wake lake along the northern edge of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum has the feel of a northern Wisconsin lake with the lack of development on the southern shore. Wingra offers plenty of musky greater than 35 inches, and a small number over 40. DNR crews will be completing a musky population estimate in spring 2005 after tagging nearly 300 fish in 2004. Most of the northern side of the lake is accessible to shore fishing, making Wingra a great place to wet a line. Panfish are numerous but small, but with some work nice crappie and perch can be caught. Wingra has one paved boat launch, limited parking, and rental boats and canoes available.

Dane County trout streams - Ever popular are Black Earth Creek near Cross Plains and Mount Vernon Creek south of Mount Horeb. Both streams hold high trout numbers of all sizes and offer true wild fish. Local favorites include the improved stretches on the West Branch of the Sugar River, Deer Creek, Fryes Feeder, Garfoot Creek, and Vermont Creek. Recent habitat improvement and bank stabilization work on Pleasant Valley Creek, German Valley Creek, and Primrose Branch have resulted in significant additions to fishing opportunities and work toward creating self-perpetuating trout populations. These streams have tremendous potential and should provide quality trout fishing for years to come. Although not currently listed as trout water, the Sugar River above County Highway A holds some large brown trout in excess of 20 inches. New maps showing both DNR ownership and public easement along these streams are available from the South Central Regional Office. Several other creeks require landowner permission but hold some nice fish. Flynn Creek, Badger Mill Creek and the Upper Sugar River all contain trout that an experienced angler can pursue.

- Kurt Welke, fisheries biologist, Fitchburg

Dodge County lakes

Beaver Dam Lake - Fall electrofishing on Beaver Dam Lake found good numbers of black crappie, with the majority (50 percent) of the fish 9 to 10 inches in length. Walleyes sampled during fall electrofishing ranged from 6 to 19 inches. Largemouth bass ranged in size from 8.2 to 17.5 inches. Bluegill up to 8 inches were sampled, with the majority of fish (48 percent) between 7 and 8 inches.

Fox Lake - Walleye catch rates for 2004 fall electrofishing were 86.5 per hour, up from 45.7 per hour in 2003 and 23.6 per hour in 2002. One-quarter of walleye sampled were 15 inches, and 14.4 percent were 16 inches. Young-of-the-year (YOY) walleye under 10 inches were caught at a rate of 11.5 per hour in 2004, compared to 25 per hour in 2003, 13.8 per hour in 2002 and 0 per hour in 2001. Catch rates of largemouth bass were 17.8 per hour in 2004, up from 2.9 per hour in 2003. Largemouth bass ranged in length from 3.1 to 20.4 inches, with an average length of 7.7 inches. Nearly two-thirds of yellow perch measured were 4 inches, followed by 18.3 percent at 5 inches. Yellow perch ranged from 2 to 10.9 inches, with an average length of 4.9 inches. Excellent crappie fishing should continue on Fox Lake, with 2004 fall electrofishing results indicating 53 percent of the black crappie sampled 9 to 10 inches in length.

Jefferson County

Rock Lake - Rock Lake continues to be a producer of decent-sized largemouth and smallmouth bass. Largemouth bass ranged from 2.3 to 16.5 inches, and smallmouth bass from 4.4 to 14.2 inches. Walleye numbers remain consistently low, with catch rates of only 3.7 per hour, and ranging from 14.2 to 18.9 inches. Bluegills up to 8.1 inches and yellow perch up to 8.4 inches were sampled. Rock bass were the second-most abundant panfish species, at 50 fish per hour and up to 9.9 inches in length.

- Laura Stremick-Thompson, fisheries biologist, Horicon

Lafayette County

Yellowstone Lake - The forecast for Yellowstone Lake is again looking good for 2005. Since starting intensive management efforts in 1997, the fishery has steadily improved every year, an assessment backed up by our fisheries surveys. Based on 2004 surveys, anglers in 2005 can expect good to excellent fishing for crappies, walleye, channel catfish, largemouth bass and smallmouth bass. Musky, and northern pike populations are considered fair. Smallmouth bass ranged from 7.3 to 17.3 inches, with the average mature fish 10.4 inches. Largemouth bass ranged from 4.3 to 19.9 inches, with a 12.1 inch average; walleye ranged from 7.4 inches to 26.5 inches, with 14.8 the average. Black crappie ranged from 2.4 to 9.2 inches with an 8.2 average, and bluegill sunfish ranged from 2.5 to 8 inches with a 6.4-inch average. Muskies up to 34 inches, northern pike up to 33 inches and channel catfish up to 24 inches were sampled.

Lafayette and Iowa counties

Pecatonica River - Fish kills in 2004 have many anglers wondering about the future of the Pecatonica River fishery. Follow up surveys have indicated the walleye, channel catfish, and flathead catfish populations are still in good condition and will provide the consistent catch rates which anglers are accustomed to. Walleyes up to 28 inches, channel catfish up to 30 inches, and flathead catfish up to 35 inches were netted. Channel catfish were most abundant followed by the flathead catfish and walleye. Also present in the surveys were smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, northern pike, crappies, and bluegills.

Smallmouth bass streams - 2003 produced one of the best year classes of smallmouth in recent history. This will help the small streams in southwest Wisconsin continue to produce quality smallmouth bass fisheries. Although the 2003 year class will not produce trophy fish yet, it will provide a good number of 9- to 12-inch fish to catch. Some of the more productive streams will include the Galena River, Yellowstone River, Blockhouse Creek, and the Platte/ Little Platte rivers. *- Bradd Sims, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville*

Since the start of intensive management efforts in 1997 at Yellowstone Lake, the fishery has steadily improved every year. DNR netting surveys conducted in 2004 on the lake reflected this trend, so anglers in 2005 can expect good to excellent fishing for crappies, walleye, channel catfish, largemouth bass and smallmouth bass. Photo: Bradd Sims

Southeast Region

Southern Lake Michigan

Open lake fishing - With over 1.4 million chinooks stocked annually, there's no reason the very good fishing shouldn't continue. Many fish 15 to 20 pounds were reported in 2004. The forage base in Lake Michigan is on a slight decline and may have had an impact on the chinooks' growth rates.

In spring 2004, coho were abundant but relatively small. They attained faster growth rates as the summer wore on, and 8- or 9-pound fish became more and more common. In 2005, coho fishing is expected to be as good as, if not better than, 2004.

The lake trout season was good in 2004 when anglers chose to target them. We believe that recent stockings of nearshore sites have contributed to the strong lake trout fishery, and this trend should continue in 2005.

Steelhead catches in recent years have been average at best. Because of the excellent chinook fishing close to shore, anglers haven't been as inclined to search for steelhead out in deeper water.

Nearshore fishing - Shore anglers enjoyed some very good fishing in July and August working harbors and river mouths for Skamania steelhead staging in anticipation of their early fall spawning run. The Chambers Creek and Ganaraska strains provide late winter and early spring action.

Two additional rainbow trout strains were stocked on an experimental basis — the Arlee strain starting in 2001 and the Kamloops strain in 2003. The Arlees have quickly been reaching catchable size and we hope they'll continue to augment the nearshore fishery in coming years.

Brown trout fishing was hit-or-miss in spring 2004, but improved in the fall. Browns provide a consistent nearshore fishery during the cold months, especially at warm-water discharges and near river mouths. In 2003 we stocked about 125,000 Seeforellen and 300,000 domestic brown trout in southeast Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan.

Although the yellow perch population in Lake Michigan continues to be depressed, fishing from the piers and shore was very good at times in spring and summer 2004. The 1998 year class still supports the greatest percentage of the harvest, but the 2001 and 2002 year classes are beginning to show up in catches as well.

Habitat improvements in many of our harbors over the last decade have translated into increasing naturally reproducing populations of smallmouth bass and northern pike, two species native to Lake Michigan.

Walleye are stocked in the Milwaukee River as part of a walleye restoration plan have shown good survival and high growth rates.

Tributary fishing - October rains brought a burst of cohos and Skamania strain steelhead to the Root River Steelhead Facility in Racine, where we met our goals for coho egg collection.

Spring and fall steelhead runs have not been strong in recent years, but anglers can generally look for Skamania in mid-September, Chambers Creek in late fall and can be found through March and early April, and Ganaraska as early as late November and December and again from late March through April.

As always, the tributary fishery depends on water temperature and flow conditions, which trigger the upstream migration of salmonids. If flow conditions improve in 2005 we expect a good tributary fishery.

For up-to-date fishing information, call the Southern Lake Michigan Fishing Hotline at 414-382-7920. To read information about our Lake Michigan program visit www.fishingwisconsin.org then look under "Fisheries Program" to find "Lake Michigan."

– Pradeep Hirethota and Cheryl Peterson, Southern Lake Michigan fisheries, Milwaukee

Milwaukee River - Fishing opportunities for smallmouth bass in the River and the Milwaukee Inner and Outer Harbors are expected to be good. While smallmouth bass recruitment and overall numbers remain high, larger quality sized fish remain less frequent. Anglers are encouraged to practice catch and release. Walleye restoration efforts are continuing for the Milwaukee River Estuary so anglers should not be surprised if they land one. Spring and fall steelhead, and fall runs of chinook and coho salmon will provide steady action in the lower reaches of the Menomonee and Milwaukee rivers. Anglers contemplating eating fish from Lake Michigan and tributary streams should consult the state's fish consumption advisory. - *Will Wawrzyn, fisheries biologist, Milwaukee*

Waukesha County

Despite stocking only two lakes in the county with muskies — Pewaukee and Okauchee lakes each get up to 3,000 musky fingerlings annually — fishable musky populations have developed in five others.

Recent surveys have estimated spawning age musky populations of Pewaukee and Okauchee lakes at 0.52 and 0.23 muskies per surface acre, respectively. In spring 2004 DNR fisheries staff estimated the Oconomowoc Lake musky population at 102 males and 64 females, equaling a total adult density of 0.22 per acre, nearly identical to that found in Okauchee Lake.

We've long suspected that some of the stocked muskies migrate from Okauchee Lake into the upstream waters of North Lake and Pine Lake, and into the downstream waters of Oconomowoc Lake, Fowler Lake and Lac La Belle.

Nearby Pewaukee Lake, which has a higher number of muskies, is in a different watershed and not connected to the Oconomowoc River lakes.

Spring spawning migrations offer the chance to see muskies below the Okauchee Lake dam on the Oconomowoc River and the Barstow Street dam on the Fox River in the City of Waukesha. But don't try to catch them because the season opener is still several weeks away. Despite the muskies going through the motions of spawning, DNR has not seen evidence of natural reproduction in any of these southeast Wisconsin lakes. All are maintained by stocking, either directly or indirectly.

Lower Oconomowoc River - A recent rehabilitation project is breathing new life into an oft-overlooked resource in southeast Wisconsin. The Lower Oconomowoc River between Lac La Belle and the Rock River has long been plagued by an overabundance of carp. The fish have suppressed plant growth by rooting up valuable plants to get at insects, and tied up nutrients needed by gamefish. Work began in summer 2003 with installation of an electrical fish barrier to prevent carp migrating into the Oconomowoc River from the Rock. The next phase was completed in fall 2004 when rotenone, a fish toxicant, was used to kill carp that remained in the Oconomowoc River after gamefish, panfish and forage fish were removed and held in pens. Once the treatment was complete, the gamefish and forage fish were restocked to begin repopulating the river with native fish. Additional fish were stocked from other local waters, and the restocking will continue through 2005 with more panfish and forage fish. Already, plant growth has increased. There is little publicly owned land along the Lower Oconomowoc, but it is accessible via several road crossings as long as anglers either float it or wade in the water, and in future years, can deliver hours of recreation and often a stringer of nice fish.

- Susan Beyler, senior fisheries biologist, Waukesha

Walworth County

Healthy self-sustaining largemouth bass populations inhabit county lakes. DNR's electrofishing survey on Whitewater Lake in spring 2004 caught largemouth bass at the rate of 55 per hour. Size structure was excellent, with bass up to 21.1 inches. Nearly two-thirds were legal size bass — 14 inches or larger. A fall 2004 electrofishing survey on Tripp Lake caught 76 bass per hour. Size structure was good, with bass up to 19.4 inches, and 30 percent 14 inches or larger. Bass were caught at the rate of 54 per hour during a spring 2004 electrofishing survey on Potters Lake, with bass up to 18 inches long and more than one-third over 14 inches.

Lauderdale Lakes - DNR's smallmouth bass stocking program on the Lauderdale Lakes is beginning to pay off. Between 2001 and 2004, 45,298 DNR-raised smallmouth fingerlings were stocked. Twenty-two of these fish were collected during a fall 2004 fish survey, and although they aren't legal size yet, their growth is good. A few years from now, anglers can look forward to another smallmouth bass angling opportunity in the southeast region.

Delavan and Geneva lakes - Excellent populations of walleye, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and northern pike are found on these lakes. DNR regularly stocks both lakes with walleyes. Fish surveys on Delavan Lake in 2004 collected walleyes up to 23 inches long, and bass up to 18 inches long. More than one-quarter of the walleyes were legal size —18 inches— or larger. Lake trout are a bonus target on Geneva Lake; about 20,000 are stocked annually. Special regulations on Delavan Lake and Geneva Lake help produce quality size fish for anglers.

Other Walworth County waters - A protected 12- to 16-inch slot size limit on largemouth bass on Lake Beulah means anglers can have a quality fishing experience here also.

DNR's habitat improvement and wild trout stocking program on Bluff Creek provides anglers with an excellent brown trout fishing opportunity. Our fish surveys have produced brown trout up to 22 inches long.

Kenosha County

Vern Wolf Lake - DNR's rehabilitation of the fish community here continues with plans to transfer more northern pike and largemouth bass into the lake in 2005. Fall 2004 fish surveys revealed abundant populations of bluegills, crappies, and yellow perch. Most bluegills in the sample were 5 inches long with some up to 7 inches. Most crappies and yellow perch were 6 inches with some crappies reaching 7 inches. Largemouth bass up to 14 inches and northern pike up to 27 inches also were sampled. Panfish and gamefish will continue to grow. The 18-inch minimum size limit and 1 daily bag limit on bass, and the daily bag limit of 10 on panfish, should provide anglers with quality fishing in the future.

Silver Lake - A good bet for walleyes, largemouth bass, and muskellunge. DNR stocks about 23,000 walleyes every other year and 1,000 muskellunge every year. Fish surveys have sampled musky up to 47 inches long. The 18-inch minimum size limit and 1 daily bag limit on largemouth bass gives anglers a chance to catch quality size fish.

Fox River - The river supports a spring and fall white bass run. Channel catfish and sheepshead can be caught throughout summer and fall.

Racine County

Browns Lake - This lake supports a robust largemouth bass population. A fall 2004 DNR electrofishing survey produced a catch rate of 110 per hour, with most bass 13 to 15 inches long. The special 16-inch minimum size limit provides anglers with a quality fishing opportunity. Since starting a walleye stocking program on Browns Lake in 2002, DNR has stocked 84,049 walleyes. As the stocking program continues and the population grows, anglers in the southeast region can anticipate an additional walleye fishing spot in the future.

Other Racine County waters - Rockland Lake, a 40-acre carry-in lake, is a good choice for largemouth bass, and, with its undeveloped shoreline, provides an aesthetically pleasing fishing experience. Tichigan and Wind Lakes are both stocked with walleyes in alternate years and have free DNR launches.

Judy Kescenovitz of Hubertus, with daughter Debbie, displays a nice 7.5 pound largemouth bass caught from Waukesha County's Pine Lake in 2004.

Fox River - Smallmouth bass anglers should do well on the river between Rochester and Burlington. If the smallmouth aren't biting, the channel cats probably are.

- Doug Welch, senior fisheries biologist, Sturtevant

Fond du Lac County

Long Lake - One of the best all-around fishing lakes in Wisconsin's southeastern corner is Long Lake near Dundee, in the Kettle Moraine State Forest – Northern Unit. It's also one of the best panfish and largemouth bass lakes around.

DNR's 2004 fish population survey confirmed the presence of good numbers of bluegills up to nine inches long, good numbers of largemouth bass with an exceptionally high average size, and a large number of northern pike — most under the current 26-inch size limit. The survey also produced some nice yellow perch and many quality size bullheads. Clearly, the lake has a fish population that has the quality and abundance that we look for throughout Wisconsin.

Good quality fishing is available in the early morning before boaters hit the lake at 10 am., and in the evening during the slow-no-wake period.

- John E. Nelson, senior fisheries biologist, Plymouth

Southeastern Wisconsin trout streams

Nearly one-third of all Wisconsin residents live in this region and our lakes and streams receive very heavy angling, but they continue to produce great fish and a variety of fishing opportunities, thanks in large part to the efforts of our fisheries managers, technicians and hatchery personnel — and their willingness to try new approaches.

For trout anglers, we have quality fishing opportunities from Walworth County's Bluff Creek all the way up to Sheboygan County's Onion River. Both streams have gone from mediocre fisheries, at best, to offering outstanding fishing opportunities through habitat improvement efforts by our fish biologists and technicians. Most of the trout in these streams remain stocked fish; but the managers are working on all kinds of projects that should increase trout natural reproduction in the future. Other trout fisheries not to be missed—Paradise Springs Catch and Release Spring Pond within the Kettle Moraine State Forest in Waukesha County; Cedar Creek is nearing trout stream status.

- Randy Schumacher, fisheries supervisor, Waukesha

West Central Region

Black River Falls area

Fish population monitoring in the lower river and in stretches above the Black River Falls and Hatfield dams in 2004 showed strong populations of both sport and rough fish species. Gaining popularity is the annual Lake Arbutus Carpfest, sponsored by the Hatfield Sportsman Club and Lake Arbutus Association. It started in 2003 to help reduce carp populations that local anglers and residents feared were harming fish habitat and water quality. If you fancy yourself a champion carp angler, or just want to have some fun and help out the cause, bring your gear and a group of friends to Arbutus in July.

If carp aren't your bag, spring crappie and fall muskellunge fishing are also popular and walleye fishing is usually best after first ice when adult fish move out of the upper Black River and East Fork of the Black River into the lake.

A large part of this area's fishery resources are coldwater trout streams. Restoration projects, land acquisition efforts, and improved land-use practices have improved habitat, water quality, trout production, and public accessibility. Stockwell Creek, Buffalo River, Trempealeau River, and Tank Creek are a few of the larger state fishing areas which, combined, provide almost 3,000 acres of public fishing grounds. Ongoing surveys indicate area streams should continue providing good trout fishing this year.

- Dan Hatleli, fisheries biologist, Black River Falls

Portage County

Tomorrow River - Fish surveys above and below the old dam at Nelsonville found increased brown trout, with one-quarter in the harvest slot — 10 to 13 inches — and a few greater than 20 inches. Brook trout catches were lower than that of browns, but some fish are available for harvest. Work progressed this past summer farther upstream on a new habitat project on the Richard Hemp Fishery Area near the County Highway I access. The work is scheduled to be done in 2005 and will increase available trout habitat in nearly a mile of stream. It includes brush removal and bundling to narrow the stream and increase depth and velocities, installation of mini-lunker structures for overhead cover, and log and boulder retards to create mid-channel cover.

Flume Creek - Stream improvements were completed in 2003 on 7,000 feet of the Flume and should improve conditions for this Class 1 trout water. Work included brush bundle placement to narrow and deepen the channel, mini-lunker structures to provide overhead cover, digger logs, K-dams, boulder retards, and plunge pools to enhance mid-channel cover, and four sediment traps. This section holds primarily brook trout, with an abundance of small fish and a moderate number over the harvest size of 9 inches. Access to the stream is good; DNR maintains a well marked fishing-only easement both above and below Stoney Hill Road.

Stevens Point Flowage - This continues to be a good choice for anglers seeking a close destination with a variety of species. The latest survey on the 2,093-acre flowage in 2002 indicated continued strong recruitment of walleye. Thirty percent of the 444 walleye captured by a combination of spring netting and summer electrofishing were at or above the 15-inch minimum size limit. The flowage also has a good population of northern pike. A total of 213 northern pike were collected with about 6 percent at or above the 32-inch size limit. The flowage has a good population of black crappie with 45 percent at or above 10 inches. And, although poor catches were observed during this survey, the flowage has good numbers of smallmouth bass and a continually improving channel catfish fishery. With a combination of stocking by DNR and local musky clubs, the musky fishery continues to improve.

Marathon County

Plover River - DNR, in cooperation with landowners and Trout Unlimited, in 2004 completed a stream restoration on 5,000 feet of the Plover River in Marathon County from Highway 153 upriver. The river channel had filled up with sediment and widened as a result primarily of past farming practices and logging operations. The work included installing wing deflectors to narrow and deepen the stream channel, increase water temperatures and expose favorable substrate for possible trout reproduction. Other work included installing two islands and extending one natural island, strategically placing 300 large boulders, logs and other woody debris to provide cover for fish, and restoring flowing springs by cleaning out the fallen tag alder or grass clogging the springs. The work substantially increased the amount of overhead and mid-channel cover, created expansive areas of backwater where planting aquatic plants would benefit waterfowl, deer, muskrats, and songbirds as well as reptiles and amphibians. Future stream surveys are planned to evaluate the use of this habitat by trout and we may boost the population by stocking native brook trout in areas previously uninhabitable by trout.

Big Eau Pleine Reservoir - 2003 surveys by a combination of treaty unit and Central Wisconsin fish management staff to estimate walleye abundance and evaluate the 32-inch northern pike regulation found that the adult walleye population has continued to improve. The population estimate of 43,695 is well over the 30,000 fish estimated in 1999. About two-thirds of these fish were between 12 and 14.9 inches, and 13 percent were at or above the 15-inch minimum size limit. Walleye growth rates were nearly identical to the statewide average; given the large numbers of walleye, anglers should enjoy some success for the next year or two.

A total of 1,375 adult northern pike were captured, with small pike abundant. About 20 percent were 26 inches or greater, and 3 percent were at or above the 32-inch size limit. One 43-inch pike was captured, so there appears to be future opportunity for trophy fish. We intend to continue to use this data to evaluate the 32-inch size limit and produce recommendations for this fishery.

Although musky were not a primary target of this survey, we did capture 44, of which, 41 percent were 34 inches or longer.

Overall, the fishery is healthy and diverse. This survey also captured smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and discovered white bass for the first time; the presence of two year classes of this species indicates it could become more common in future years. - *Tom Meronek, fisheries biologist, Wausau; Jason Spaeth, fisheries technician, Wisconsin Rapids*

Wood and Portage counties

DNR netting surveys on the "Big Pete" in April 2003 — the Wisconsin River's largest flowage — found excellent numbers of a wide variety of game fish and panfish species. We feel the information is also applicable to the nearby Castle Rock Flowage since conditions on the two flowages are nearly identical.

Walleye - Surveys captured 155 walleyes, ranging in size from 6 to 27.4 inches. Fifty-eight percent were under 15 inches and were protected, 34 percent were in the harvest slot between 15 and 20 inches, and 8 percent were in the protected slot between 20 and 28 inches. No walleyes 28 inches or larger were captured; the cold water encountered during the survey reduced the walleye catch but increased our catch of northern pike.

Walleye growth rates are excellent, exceeding the state average at every age. The combination of excellent growth rates, and excellent natural reproduction year after year, allows the walleye population to sustain itself despite huge numbers of anglers enjoying the year-round walleye fishing.

Northern pike - Northern pike populations have increased in numbers and average size as a result of the one daily bag limit and 32-inch minimum size limit. 241 northern pike were captured in the survey, ranging from 9 inches to 42.4 inches, with 82.9 percent under the 32-inch size limit and 17.7 percent over it. The survey's timing and extremely cold water favored northern pike and greatly increased our effectiveness at capturing them. The survey determined excellent northern pike growth rates compared to the state average.

Musky - Twenty-eight muskies captured in the survey, ranged from 11.7 inches to 47.1 inches, with nearly two-thirds larger than the existing 34-inch minimum size limit. Wisconsin River muskies are capable of reaching very large sizes due to their fast growth rates; all result from stocking by DNR or angling clubs. Stocking pure strain muskies is very expensive so relatively low numbers are stocked. No evidence of natural reproduction has been found.

Bass - Largemouth and smallmouth bass are both present, but cold water during our survey led to only a small number being captured. Unfortunately the winter drawdowns, wave action, and carp make it difficult for the aquatic vegetation that largemouth prefer to grow and the largemouth bass numbers remain limited. Smallmouth bass are better suited to the conditions of the Petenwell Flowage. Anglers can expect to find them anywhere there is rock and water temps have warmed a bit. White bass are also present but their numbers greatly fluctuate year-to-year depending on year-class strengths.

Catfish - Ten years ago channel catfish were unheard of here, but they've become common in the past five years and are steadily increasing. Many of the catfish captured in the survey were in the mid- 20-inch size range and would be about 6 to 8 pounds. Anglers have discovered this new arrival and are enjoying the fish's fighting ability.

On a cautionary note, anglers should be reminded to follow consumption advice to limit exposure to PCBs in some fish from the Petenwell Flowage.

Juneau County

Brewer Creek — DNR 2004 surveys to evaluate a habitat improvement project completed in 1992 captured 109 young-of-the-year brook trout, indicating excellent natural reproduction. The numbers of adult brook trout larger than 4 inches increased 365 percent and legal-sized fish, those greater than 7 inches, increased 400 percent from a survey conducted before the habitat work. Fish crews in 2005 plan a project to maintain the habitat work done in 1992 and to create some additional overhead cover.

Adams County

Big Roche a Cri Creek - In 2003 and 2004, DNR installed 550 bundles of Christmas trees, anchoring them to the stream banks to cause the stream to narrow and deepen. The trees create excellent cover for the trout as well. Stream surveys conducted in 2004 have shown that total numbers of brook trout have increased 17 percent, but unfortunately, the number of legal sized fish has decreased 15 percent when compared to surveys from 1999. - *Scott Ironside, fisheries biologist, Friendship*

Dunn, St. Croix, Pierce and Pepin county lakes and rivers

Largemouth bass densities are abundant and trophy bass can be found in just about any waterbody, with some of the best fishing in Lake Mallalieu near Hudson, Spring Valley Reservoir near Spring Valley, and Bass Lake near Somerset.

Try Lake Menomin near Menomonie, Nugget Lake near Plum City, and Pine Lake near Baldwin for quality bluegill and black crappie.

Area waters offering great smallmouth bass fishing include Lake Menomin and Tainter Lake near Menomonie, and Riverdale Flowage near Somerset. Little Falls Lake in Willow River State Park near Hudson has excellent bass populations, however boat access is limited to canoes or rowboats.

Sport fish recruitment has been consistent on Lake St. Croix. Walleye and sauger fishing is best in the spring and fall while smallmouth fishing peaks during summer.

A couple of musky waters deserve attention for producing trophy class fish: Cedar Lake and the Apple River near Star Prairie and Tainter Lake have 45- to 50-inch fish.

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Taking the pulse of the Mighty Mississippi

How a monstrous, jumping Asian carp may affect fish on the Upper Mississippi River, and whether pesticides contaminate fish caught in the river are among questions that may soon be answered through a massive data collection effort by DNR fish, water quality and other crews.

The sampling is part of a multi-state and agency effort started in 2004 and funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to assess the river's condition, as well as that of the Midwest's other "Great Rivers," the Ohio and the Missouri.

Shovelnose sturgeon, like this one DNR fish biologist Andy Bartels examines, were among the fish sampled during a massive 2004 information collection effort to gauge the health of the Upper Mississippi River.

DNR's Onalaska field station staff collected fish and 14 other major types of river-related information from the river between Fountain City and Prairie du Chien.

Their work will provide DNR fish managers and other resource managers information to help them make decisions about managing fisheries and other natural resources. Importantly, they'll gain new categories of information that DNR previously did not collect as part of the federally funded longterm monitoring the agency participates in on the river. Concentrations of pesticides and heavy metals in fish and information about plankton, the microscopic plants and animals that live in the water, are among the new information collected.

Plankton data, for instance, is expected to help evaluate how the invasive bighead and silver carp species making their way upriver will affect young fish, paddlefish and bigmouth buffalo by competing for their food supply. Other information collected could help fish mangers and anglers gain insight about fish movements and feeding patterns in the main channel.

EPA expects to issue its Great Rivers report cards in late 2006, with a long-term goal of establishing a refined monitoring and reporting system that a dozen states can use to help evaluate how well they meet federal requirements to assure all waters are fishable and swimmable.

- Terry Dukerschein, water quality biologist, Onalaska

Major fishing regulations changes for 2005-2006

The complete *2005-2006 Guide to Wisconsin Hook and Line Fishing Regulations* is available at DNR offices and license agents. It also can be found in portable document format (.pdf) on DNR's Web site (http://www.dnr.wi.gov), then use the drop down topic menu and click on "fishing regulations" or contact the Bureau of Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection at (608) 267-7498 for more details.

The following new major rule changes take effect April 1, 2005, unless noted:

Muskellunge – The minimum length limit for muskellunge on the Wisconsin River from the Castle Rock dam (Adams/Juneau county) upstream through Wood County to the Dubay dam in Portage County increases to 45 inches.

Catfish – The daily bag limit drops to 10 in total for catfish on the Lower Wisconsin River from the Wisconsin Dells dam in Columbia and Sauk counties downstream through Dane, Iowa, Richland, Grant and Crawford counties.

Motor Trolling – Motor trolling will be eliminated on the Wolf river from its mouth at Lake Poygan upstream to the dam in the city of Shawano, and all its tributaries upstream to the first dam, including Cincoe and Partridge lakes in Winnebago, Waupaca, Outagamie and Shawano counties.

Boundary Waters – The minimum length limit for muskellunge increases to 50 inches on the Menominee River along the state's Wisconsin/Michigan boundary from the Hattie Street dam downstream to the eastern end of the breakwalls in Green Bay.

Special regulations by county

Size and/or bag limits that differ from the statewide rules have been established on the following waters:

Barron/Dunn counties – Size restrictions for trout on Knapp Pond have been removed. In addition, trout regulations on Connors Creek, Little Vance Creek, South Fork Hay River, and Upper Pine Creek downstream from the Dallas flowage have been standardized across county lines. The bag limit for trout decreases to three in total and the minimum length limit increases to 8 inches for brook trout and 12 inches for brown and rainbow trout. These regulations take effect March 1, 2005.

Dane County – The Wingra creek refuge extends to May 15.

Eau Claire County – The daily bag limit for panfish drops to 10 in total on Lake Altoona.

Jackson County – Trout regulations that previously changed only because they crossed the Trempealeau/Jackson county line will be standardized. The bag limit for trout decreases to three in total and the minimum length limit increases to 9 inches on Big Slough and Schermerhorn creeks. The bag limit for trout decreases to three in total and the minimum length limit increases to 8 inches for brook trout and 12 inches for brown and rainbow trout on Washington Coulee creek. These regulations take effect March 1, 2005.

Lafayette County – The harvest slot limit for catfish and walleye on Yellowstone Lake increases to a minimum of 15 inches and a maximum of 18 inches.

Lincoln County – New fish refuges are established from March 1 to the opening day of the general gamefish season on the Little Somo River and the Tomahawk River.

Manitowoc County – The minimum length limit increases to 18 inches and the bag limit decreases to one in total for bass; the daily bag limit decreases to 10 in total for panfish; and the minimum length limit increases to 18 inches and the daily bag limit decreases from five in total to three for walleye on Silver Lake.

Monroe County – Trout regulations that previously changed only because they crossed the Monroe/Jackson county line will be standardized. The bag limit for trout decreases to three in total and the minimum length limit increases to 9 inches on Clear and Ranch creeks. These regulations take effect March 1, 2005.

Rusk County – The minimum length limit decreases to 15 inches and the daily bag limit increases to five in total for walleye, sauger and hybrids (reverts back to statewide regulations) in Sand lake.

Taylor County – The no minimum length limit with a 14 to 18-inch protected slot for walleye, sauger and hybrids will be eliminated and regulations revert back to the statewide 15-inch minimum length limit on Rib Lake.

Trempeauleau County – Trout regulations that previously changed only because they crossed the Buffalo/Trempealeau county line will be standardized. The bag limit for trout decreases to three in total and the minimum length limit increases to 9 inches on Kilness and Sport Valley creeks. Trout regulations that previously changed only because they crossed the Eau Claire/Trempealeau county line also will be standardized. The bag limit for trout decrease to three in total and the minimum length limit increases to 9 inches Lindsay, Big and Pine creeks. These regulations take effect March 1, 2005.

Vilas County – The minimum length limit will increase to 30 inches for lake trout on Black Oak Lake. These regulation take effect March 1, 2005.

Waupaca County – New fish refuges are established from April 1 through April 15 at 3 locations on the Little Wolf River.

Walworth County – Motor trolling is allowed on all waters

Washington County – The minimum length limit increases to 18 inches and the daily bag limit decreases to one in total for bass, and the daily bag limit decreases to 10 in total for panfish on Erler Lake.

- Patrick Schmalz, treaty fisheries coordinator, Madison

Interested in passing on your love for fishing to a new generation? DNR's Angler Education workshops train adults to offer fishing programs in their communities and give them free materials they can use to teach their own angler education courses or start after-school fishing clubs. For a schedule of workshops or to learn how you can schedule Theresa Stabo, DNR's aquatic resources educator, to conduct a workshop in your area, call (608) 266-2272 or visit www.fishingwisconsin.org and look under "Kids, Parents, Educators."

Studies stress need to follow fish consumption advisories

Separate new studies suggesting that some Wisconsinites may have unhealthy mercury levels in their bodies and linking mercury exposure to heart disease are spurring state health and fish officials to urge all people who regularly eat fish to read and follow the state's fish consumption advisory.

The advisory contains recommendations for how many meals of certain fish people can safely eat from Wisconsin waters to gain the benefits of eating fish while reducing exposure to environmental contaminants. Wisconsin's advisory also contains recommendations regarding consumption of store-bought fish.

"These studies provide a good reminder of why it's important for all people, regardless of their age or gender, to follow Wisconsin's advice for eating fish caught from our lakes and rivers," says Candy Schrank, a Department of Natural Resources toxicologist who coordinates Wisconsin's fish consumption advisory, which DNR issues with the Department of Health and Family Services. "People who buy fish from a store also need to evaluate how much fish they are eating."

Preliminary study results from a Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) study, as well as anecdotal reports, indicate that some Wisconsin residents are eating game fish species more frequently than recommended, whether it's fish they catch, buy at the store or both.

Based on analysis of more than 1,000 hair samples from Wisconsin residents, 14 percent of women and 23 percent of men have high mercury levels, according to Dr. Lynda Knobeloch, the lead DHFS researcher. Those proportions may change as the study analyzes hair samples from the additional 1,000 subjects sought.

Wisconsin is one of more than 40 states that issues advice to people to limit their fish meals to reduce exposure to mercury that enters lakes primarily from airborne sources including power plants, is absorbed by fish and other wildlife, and ultimately, by the people who eat the fish. Nearly all Wisconsin lakes and rivers are covered by the same general consumption advice. In addition, some 90-plus waters with higher mercury levels carry specific advice, and about 50 waters carry specific consumption advice to reduce risks from exposure to PCB-contaminated fish.

Wisconsin issues separate recommendations for women of childbearing years and children younger than 15, and for older women and men. This two-tier advice reflects that developing fetuses are more at risk from mercury because of the sensitivity of the developing nervous system, but also that adults' cardiovascular and immune systems may be affected by exposure to low levels of mercury over their lifetime.

Concerns about mercury's effects on adults, in fact, are deepening in light of recent European studies strengthening the link between consumption of mercury-contaminated fish and heart disease. Such research, Knobeloch says, underscores the need to follow Wisconsin's fish consumption advice.

Wisconsin's fish consumption advisory, "Choose Wisely - a health guide for eating fish in Wisconsin," can be found online at www.fishingwisconsin.org, under "Wisconsin Fish," and "Consumption Advice" or it can be obtained from DNR service centers.

West Central Region

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Northern pike fishing remains spotty in most lakes, however Lake Menomin is a consistent producer of medium-size pike.

Smallmouth bass, walleye and sauger are common in the highly scenic stretch of the Chippewa River downstream from Eau Claire to the Mississippi River near Pepin. Catfishing is best downstream with a few trophy flatheads lurking in flooded timber near the Mississippi River. Few anglers are aware of a significant musky population in the Eau Claire area.

The Red Cedar River upstream from Tainter Lake will continue to provide high quality fishing opportunities for smallmouth bass, walleye and northern pike, with angling best in spring before vegetation becomes abundant. Smallmouth bass, walleye, catfish and northern pike are common on the St. Croix River near Somerset with an excellent size structure.

Dunn, Pepin, Pierce and St. Croix County trout streams

Another phenomenal trout fishing season is forecast for 2005.

Pierce County streams provide outstanding brook and brown trout fishing, with the Kinnickinnic, Rush and Trimbelle rivers and Plum, Cady, Lost and Isabelle creeks good choices in 2005. A major brook trout restoration project completed on Cady Creek near Elmwood has resulted in new angler access to several miles of tremendous wild brook trout habitat. Dam outlet modifications have improved water temperatures, and habitat improvement will continue into 2005. Trout anglers can anticipate major improvements in brown trout fishing near Spring Valley.

Outstanding wild brown trout fishing continues on the Kinnickinnic. Two years after a 10- to 14-inch protected slot size limit was installed, recent surveys have shown that the average trout size has increased substantially, with many fish reaching the slot length. Small trout remain abundant and anglers are encouraged to take a limit of trout under the slot. An occasional 20-inch brown trout remains a possibility in 2005.

Wild brook trout will be plentiful in the headwaters of Wilson Creek, Gilbert Creek, Knights Creek and the South Fork of the Hay River. Restoration of Gilbert Creek began in 2003 and most likely will continue during the next several years. Abundant wild brown trout can be found throughout Elk Creek. Anglers fishing in the Glenwood City area should find Tiffany and Beaver creeks excellent choices for wild brook trout.

The best trout streams to target this year in the Pepin county area are Arkansaw, Little Bear and Plum creeks. The potential to catch a quality-sized brook trout greater than 12 inches exists due to ample forage and excellent growth rates. Lower Plum Creek is slowly improving; although trout densities are low, quality brown trout can be found there.

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SPORT FISH RESTORATION